NMC, Right to Democracy to host talk on building solidarity in US territories. PAGE 2
GAO: CNMI employers' use of CW-1 permits keeps dropping. PAGE 4

Hafa Adai!

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Saipan Tribune

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Palacios: Region remains at risk of severe economic crisis

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Palacios

Despite the increase in the total number of workers in the CNMI in 2021 and 2022—as the U.S. Government Accountability Office had found—the region remains at risk of a severe economic crisis with limited prospects for recovery, according to Gov. Arnold I. Palacios.

» **This despite GAO's findings of an increase in the number of workers in the CNMI between 2021 and 2022**

Challenges such as the struggling tourism industry and the decision to shift away from the Chinese market pose

See PALACIOS on Page 4

ASH WEDNESDAY OBET AGUILAR/
The CNMI's Catholic faithful flocked to churches last Feb. 14 to observe Ash Wednesday, which is the first day of Lent where ash is smudged on the forehead of believers to mark the start of the six weeks of penitence before Easter. Photo shows Rev. Fr. Eric Mikako Paluku, CRM perform the sacramental act on a parishioner at the Kristo Rai Church in Garapan.

Cop suing DPS, CSC is reinstated

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Acting Department of Public Safety commissioner Anthony Macaranas has reinstated Sgt. Peter Camacho, who earlier filed numerous grievances against DPS with the Civil Service Commission and is now accusing the

See COP on Page 4

Macaranas

'Dewey was never employed with SCS'

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Saipan Community School denies that fugitive Charles Lee Dewey III, aka Carter Allen Widmor, was ever employed to teach there.

In an emotional letter he read in open court last Wednesday, Dewey essentially shared that he is a victim of false accusations regarding the rape and sexual misconduct involving minors charges he currently faces in Indiana.

See DEWEY on Page 4

Gas up 10 cents

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

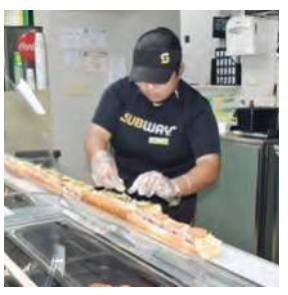
The increase of gas prices only continues with local oil companies raising prices back-to-back with another increase last Wednesday afternoon.

Late last Wednesday afternoon, local oil companies increased their prices again by 10 cents. This is officially the

See GAS on Page 4

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Mobil Oil Marianas raised its prices late last Wednesday afternoon with gas now at $5.56 per gallon.

INSIDE



BUSINESS
Subway Restaurants in Gualo Rai and Chalan Piao are now serving hero-sized treats for sandwich enthusiasts called the Deli Heroes.
PAGE 14

NATION
A recent decline in arrests for illegal crossings on the U.S. border with Mexico may prove only temporary.
PAGE 15

OFFBEAT
Charlotte, a rust-colored stingray the size of a serving platter, has spent much of her life gliding around the confines of a storefront aquarium in North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains.
PAGE 17

SCAN ME WITH A COMPATIBLE QR READER TO KEEP UPDATED ON ALL THE LATEST NEWS.

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Local

NMC, Right to Democracy to host talk on building solidarity in US territories

Northern Marianas College and Right to Democracy are set to host a conversation on democracy, equity, and self-determination in U.S. territories with legal experts from American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands on Monday, Feb. 19, 2024, from 5pm to 7pm at the American Memorial Park Visitor Center Theater.

Right to Democracy is a national advocacy group that seeks to overcome historic obstacles faced by the U.S. territories. The organization hosts conversations and events around the country focused on confronting the colonial framework governing people in U.S. territories.

The panel of legal experts includes Charles V. Ala'ilima, co-counsel, *Fitisemanu v. United States* (American Samoa); Pamela Colon, co-counsel, *Borja v. Nago* (U.S. Virgin Islands); Neil Weare, co-director, Right to Democracy (Guam); and Kimberlyn King-Hinds, local counsel, *Tinian Women Association et al. v. United States Department of the Navy et al.* (CNMI).

Fife

Moderated by NMC associate professor William J. Fife III, the panel will discuss recent developments in federal law and policy, as well as efforts to build solidarity across U.S. territories.

"Right to Democracy is excited to be back in the NMI with colleagues from Guam, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to explore opportunities for advancing democracy, equity, and self-determination in U.S. territories together," said Weare. ***(PR)***

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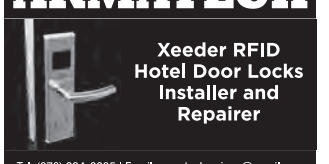
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GAO: CNMI employers' use of CW-1 permits keeps dropping

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

While CNMI employers obtained 94% of available CNMI-Only Transitional Worker (CW-1) permits in fiscal year 2018, this rate dropped to only 49% in 2020, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office report on Wednesday.

CNMI employers' use of the CW-1 permits continued to drop to 37% of available permits in fiscal year 2021, and 35% in fiscal year 2022, the same report added.

In each fiscal year between 2018 and 2022, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services approved between 82 and 84% of CW-1 applications, GAO said.

It said the number of CW-1 permits USCIS approved in the five-year period from fiscal years 2018 through 2022 remained below the established numerical limits in those years and declined significantly starting in 2020.

In fiscal year 2018, the approved CW-1 permits totaled 9,389 and the remaining number of available permits were 609, while the approved CW-1 permits in in fiscal year 2019 totaled 11,611, with the remaining available permits at 1,389.

In fiscal year 2020, 7,529 permits were approved and 7,971 were available; in fiscal year 2021, 5,584 were approved and 9,416 were available; in fiscal year 2022, 5,104 were approved and 9,396 were available.

According to GAO, USCIS and CNMI officials said the factors that caused the total CNMI workforce to shrink during calendar years 2018 to 2022 also likely caused a decline in applications for CW-1 permits, leading to the decline in approved permits.

According to USCIS and CNMI officials, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly restricted travel, reducing the number of tourists who could boost the economy and of employers who might have otherwise applied for CW-1 permits.

In addition, the closure of the largest casino, Imperial Pacific International (CNMI) LLC, on Saipan before completion of all its buildings meant fewer jobs in CNMI, contributing to a lower number of CW-1 applications.

Other factors related to the CW-1 permit process may have further decreased CW-1 permit applications.

For example, GAO said, USCIS officials noted that some employers may have been deterred from applying for CW-1 permits when new requirements and higher fees for the CW-1 permit took effect in 2020.

The transition period during which CW-1 workers may be admitted to perform work is set to end on Dec. 31, 2029, or three months into fiscal year 2030. After this date, no CW-1 permits are authorized to be issued by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

GAO reviewed the CNMI's worker data and reporting from 2018 to 2022. The NMI U.S. Workforce Act of 2018 includes a provision for GAO to report every two years on the ratio between U.S. and foreign workers in CNMI's workforce in each of the previous five calendar years. This latest report is GAO's third in response to the provision.

DEWEY

From page 1

In his letter, Dewey claimed that, while on Saipan to escape the charges he faces in Indiana, he taught children at private Christian schools, one of them being Saipan Community School.

However, Saipan Community School director Stephen Dame says this is false and that Dewey was never a teacher at SCS.

"Charles Lee Dewey, known to us as Carter Widmor, has never been employed [nor] volunteered to teach for Saipan Community School. He has never been associated with the school's music program in any way. No music lessons were ever sponsored by Saipan Community School or Saipan Community Church nor were these organizations involved in assisting him with music lessons in any way," he said.

Dame also serves as senior pastor of Saipan Community Church, which runs the school.

Dewey, in an attempt to paint a positive picture of his character for the court, also shared that he was an active volunteer at Saipan Community Church and stated that the church's pastor can vouch for his character, ultimately insisting he is not a "monster" capable of the crimes he is being accused of.

Dame said this is another false representation.

"Charles Lee Dewey III was never an 'active' volunteer at Saipan Community Church and did not have any 'position' within the church. He had served a couple times in setting up and cleaning up. While he did occasionally attend church services, he hasn't been in attendance for at least the last six months," he said.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

COP

From page 1

commission of violating the Open Government Act.

In a letter to Camacho yesterday, Macaranas said he is rescinding the police officer's termination last Dec. 14, 2023, effective yesterday.

"Therefore, the informal administrative conference that was rescheduled for Feb. 7 to Feb. 15 is now cancelled and will not be rescheduled. We look forward to your return and assistance with the important work at DPS," the letter stated.

Camacho was terminated from his post by former DPS commissioner Clement Bermudes.

That led to Camacho suing DPS, and later, the CSC, for allegedly violating his rights and the Open Government Act over the way his grievances were handled.

Camacho is also the same officer mentioned in a letter from Gov. Arnold I. Palacios addressed to Bermudes last Dec. 22, 2023, where Palacios expressed concern over Bermudes' "inconsistency in following [Palacios'] instructions."

"This is to address the recent disciplinary and seemingly retaliatory actions against Sgt. Peter Camacho, which contravened my directives and continues to be an issue. Despite my explicit instructions regarding Sgt. Camacho's assignment at Marianas Regional Fusion Center at the CNMI Department of Homeland [Security], he was purposely issued an [absence without leave] notice and subjected to unwarranted punitive measures. This inconsistency in following my direct instructions and the treatment of Sgt. Camacho is concerning and unacceptable. To be clear, effective immediately, I am hereby ordering the reassignment of Sgt. Peter Camacho to the Marianas Regional Fusion Center at the CNMI Department of Homeland Security, under the direct supervision of Chief Lawrence Camacho. Compliance with this order is mandatory and non-negotiable," the letter stated.

This letter was sent just weeks before Bermudes resigned last month at the instruction of Palacios.

Camacho, through his lawyers, Robert Torres and Oliver Manglona, had filed multiple grievances against DPS, alleging the department violated his due process rights by precluding him from applying for a merit-based salary increase, even if he was the top qualifying candidate as outlined in the rate increase announcements.

Camacho also alleges that DPS selected unqualified candidates for the salary increase, violating the open, competitive selection policies of the CSC's rules and regulations.

Camacho has also appealed the CSC's decision denying the grievances he filed against DPS, alleging that the commission violated his rights, as well as the OGA.

The appeal was filed with the Superior Court.

According to Camacho's lawyers, the commission violated Camacho's substantive and procedural due process rights by failing to notify him of a Dec. 5, 2023, special meeting and depriving him the opportunity for his grievances to be heard.

In addition, Camacho's lawyers claim that the commission unanimously denied Camacho's grievances after deliberating in an executive session that's away from the public and thus violating the OGA.

DPS was also named a party in the appeal.

GAS

From page 1

third increase seen this year.

With the recent increase, Mobil Oil Marianas now charges $5.56 per gallon of Extra fuel from $5.46. Mobil's Supreme fuel has also increased from $5.91 to $6.01 per gallon, while diesel went up from $5.83 to $5.93.

The upward trend in gas prices this year began late in January with gas prices increasing from $5.26 per gallon of regular fuel to $5.36.

Then, in the first week of February, gas prices went up again with gas increasing from $5.36 per gallon to $5.46.

Although gas continues to increase, many are hopeful that as the year progresses, the CNMI will see prices decrease as it did last year.

"This was the case last year, if I remember correctly. Gas prices steadily increased in the beginning of the year before it steadily dropped in the [latter] half of the year. Hopefully that's the case this year," said a gas attendant.

A 27-year-old woman said this seems to be the trend.

"This seems to be the trend. We saw increases a lot last year then we saw a lot of decreases. Hopefully prices don't get too crazy in this economy," she said.

Balajadia also frustrated with delays in 702 funded projects

Balajadia

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Echoing concerns raised by lawmakers, Capital Improvement Program administrator Elizabeth S. Balajadia said yesterday that they too are frustrated with the delays in the 702 Covenant-funded projects on Tinian and Rota.

Balajadia also agreed with Sen. Francisco Q. Cruz (R-Tinian) that they have been talking about these CIP projects on Tinian for so long and that their (CIP) office too has been frustrated about the process.

She said, however, they need to understand this is the requirement of Office of Insular Affairs funding when they signed the grant's terms and conditions.

Balajadia, who is also the acting director for the Office of Planning and Development, discussed the status of CIP projects on Tinian and Rota during a joint meeting of the Senate Fiscal Affairs Committee and Senate Resources, Economic Development and Programs, and Gaming Committee.

The two committees invited Balajadia and Finance Secretary Tracy B. Norita to appear before them to talk about current CIP projects and to give committee members a chance to ask questions on these projects in order to help come up with a decision on how to proceed with a House bill.

House Bill 23-95, HS1, SS1 seeks to repeal and re-enacts a just-enacted law that authorizes a $15-million line of credit with the Marianas Public Land Trust.

One of the Fiscal Affairs Committee report's recommendations is to insert additional language to include extending the MPLT line of credit to Rota and Tinian for existing or future U.S. Economic Development Administration's Capital Improvement Projects and 702 CIP annual projects within the seven-year term of the RLOC.

Under the grant's terms and conditions, Balajadia said, they have to go through the National Environmental Policy Act process in order for OIA to give them what they call an ATP, or an authorization to proceed.

Balajadia said they also need to obtain a recommendation from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that all the NEPA has been cleared.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

PALACIOS

From page 1

significant hurdles to economic survival, said Palacios in his letter dated Jan. 17, 2024, and sent via email to GAO International Affairs and Trade acting director Nagla'a El-Hodiri. The governor's letter was attached to the GAO report, which was released Wednesday.

Palacios said the report further highlights the economic challenges the CNM still faces post-pandemic.

According to the GAO report, U.S. workers comprised a greater portion of employed workers in the CNMI in 2022 than in 2018.

In its review of the CNMI's worker data and reporting from 2018 to 2022, GAO found that the U.S. portion of CNMI workers increased and the foreign portion decreased when comparing the years 2018 and 2022.

GAO also found, among other things, that the total number of workers in the CNMI decreased each year from 2018 to 2021 before increasing between 2021 and 2022.

Palacios said in his comments about the GAO report that the statistics shared in this report regarding the CNMI-Only Transitional Worker (CW-1) permit applications and approvals reflect the economic realities the CNMI is navigating.

"We are committed to addressing these challenges and appreciate the understanding demonstrated in the report regarding the broader economic context within which these issues arise," Palacios said.

The governor expressed appreciation for the "thorough analysis and recommendations" presented in the GAO report on U.S. and foreign workers in the CNMI for the calendar years 2018 through 2022.

He said GAO's acknowledgment of the efforts made by the CNMI government in improving the transparency of their annual worker ratio reports is encouraging.

Palacios said the establishment of Standard Operating Procedures by the CNMI Department of Labor staff, aimed at enhancing transparency in the report creation process, is a significant milestone for the administration.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

FEMA hosts job fair on March 12 and 13

GUAM—The Federal Emergency Management Agency is actively expanding the local workforce to enhance their capacity to respond effectively to disaster events in the Pacific region. FEMA is opening additional local hire positions and individuals recruited through this hiring event could potentially play a crucial role in supporting ongoing relief efforts, such as response to Typhoon Mawar.

FEMA is looking for local hires in Guam for their Logistics Cadre. Submit your resume in advance to, fema-logisticscadre-recruitment@fema.dhs.gov, or bring a current resume to a hiring fair on:

■ Tuesday, March 12, and Wednesday March 13, 2024

10am-11am resume writing workshop

10am-2:30pm walk-in interviews

University of Guam, Jesus & Eugenia Leon Guerrero School of Business and Public Administration

303 University Drive, Uog Station, Mangilao, Guam, 96923,

Bldg. 12 Room 129

Interviews may be conducted on site, or you may be asked to participate in an interview later.

All applicants must be U.S. citizens, 18 years of age or older, and possess a high school diploma or GED. Individuals will be required to pass a background investigation that includes finger printing and credit check. Employees are also required to participate in mandatory direct deposit/electronic funds transfer for salary payment.

Federal resume writing webinar

To help you prepare for the hiring fair, FEMA will be hosting two Federal Resume Writing webinars on Feb. 20 from 12pm to 1:30pm (ChST) and March 4 from 12pm to 1:30pm (ChST). You can register for these free webinars by clicking on the following link: https://fema.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN_Lj3e-shrwQVWBioK4kzCNXg.

Visit the following links for the latest information:

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■ GHS/OCD Website: https://ghs.guam.gov/

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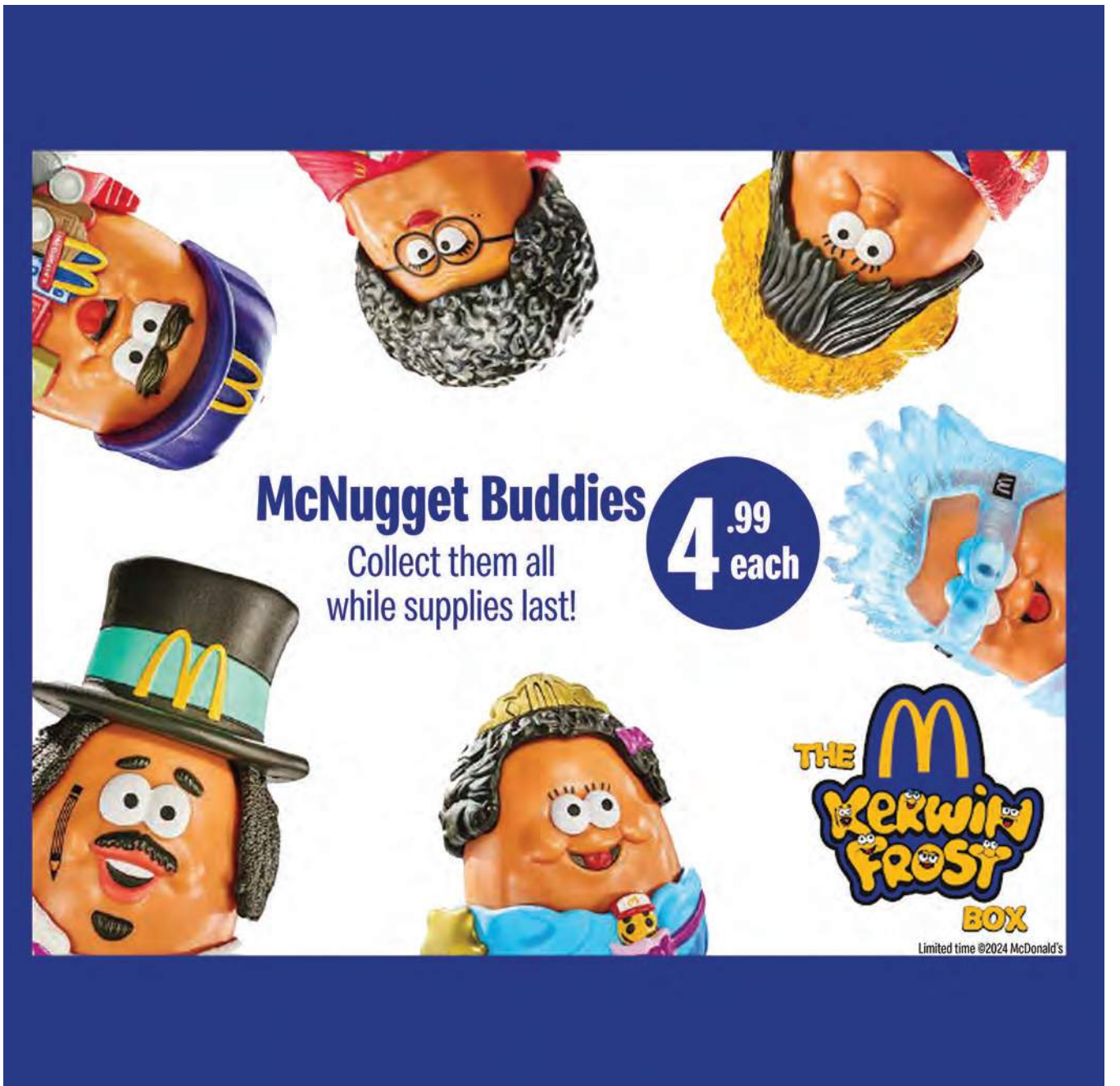

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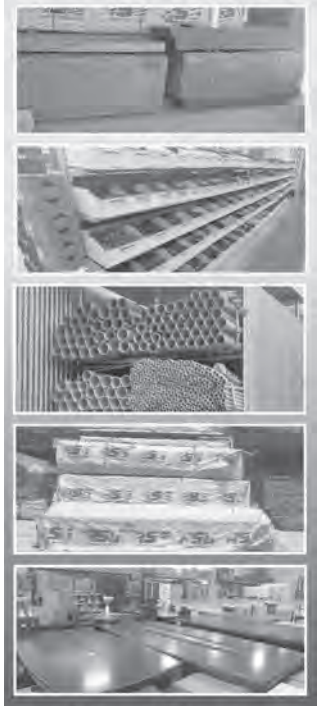
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REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
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The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC), is soliciting competitive sealed proposals from qualified and experienced entities for Debt Collection Legal Services.

The RFP Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $100.00 for one RFP package set. Perspective Entities must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply.

One (1) original and five (5) hard copies of your submission must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "**CUC-RFP-24-011, Debt Collection Legal Services**" to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 A.M.(ChST) on March 15, 2024,** Late submissions and conditional offers will not be considered.

Discussions may be conducted with responsible offerors who submit proposals determined to be reasonably susceptible of being selected for award for the purpose of clarification and to ensure full understanding of and responsiveness to solicitation requirements. All proposers shall be accorded fair and equal treatment with respect to any opportunity for discussion. During discussions, there will be no disclosure of any information derived from proposals submitted by competing proposers.

All Proposers are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the Proposer due to lack of information or understanding of the proposal requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a proposal or supply under the contract. The RFP does not commit CUC to award a contract, to pay any cost incurred in the preparation of the proposal under this request, or to procure or contract for services. The Proposers are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed as per the CUC Procurement Regulations.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered prospective proposers and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on February 23, 2024,** to Manny Sablan, CUC's Purchasing Administrator via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Bettina G. Terlaje, CUC's Chief of Administration via email betty.terlaje@cucgov.org and Marcela Tenorio, CUC's Senior Administrative Technician via email address marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for any reason and to waive any defects in said proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All proposals shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION

INVITATION FOR BIDS
CUC-IFB-24-015
A-16 SEWER LIFT STATION UPGRADE

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the construction of the A-16 Sewer Lift Station Upgrade project in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The project consists of the installation of a new polymer pre-cast concrete wet well to replace the existing A-16 wet well; installation of OFCI submersible pumps and accessories; new aboveground valve station and appurtenances with concrete pad; installation of new bar screen to replace existing A-1 bar screen; rehabilitation of existing A-16 bar screen; installation of new gravity sewer mains and manholes; installation of H2S controls; reconnection to existing lift station force main; procurement of a portable pumping system with trailer and concrete pad; installation of temporary bypass pumping operations and dewatering; site improvements with new chain-link fence, two vehicular gates and a pedestrian gate; asphaltic concrete pavement driveways with partial compacted base course area; installation of new and replacement of existing gate valves; demolition of existing minor structures and electrical upgrade. The work shall be done in accordance with the Project Plans and Specifications and without disruption to the daily operation of the water system. CUC requires the Project to be completed in **Two Hundred Seventy (270) calendar days** from date of award of contract.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States of Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA.

Prospective Bidders must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by site visits will be held on **February 27, 2024 at 10:00 AM (CHST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) copies must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "**CUC-IFB-24-015, A-16 SEWER LIFT STATION UPGRADE**" to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, **no later than 10:00 AM (CHST) March 14, 2024**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement the form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

A *Bid Guarantee* of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The bid guarantee may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States, Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidder. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). *Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.*

All bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

All questions or request for clarification regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 (ChST) on March 1, 2024** to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email at manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Ms. Nicolette Villagomez, CUC's Water/Wastewater Engineer – via email at nicolette.villagomez@cucgov.org, and Ms. Christie L. Sablan, Procurement & Supply, Senior Administrative Technician – via email at christie.sablan@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal in the best interest of the government. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

USAF, allies conduct Cope North 24 training on Tinian

USAF

Two U.S. Marine Corps F/A-18 Hornet Fighter Jets taxi on the Tinian International Airport flight line on Tinian, Feb. 11, 2024.

ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam—The Pacific Air Forces' largest, multinational exercise Cope North recently kicked off in the Northern Mariana Islands for its most robust iteration to date.

Originally held in Okinawa, Japan, and moving to Guam in 1978, Cope North 24 has etched a new chapter into the long history of this exercise by adding new training situations, operations and combined capabilities to Tinian International Airport and the Northfield.

At the Tinian International Airport, U.S. Marine Corps F/A-18 Hornets conducted Agile Combat Employment operations, practicing combat air forces dispersal activities with U.S., Royal Australian Air Force, Japan Air Self-Defense Force, Royal Canadian Air Force, Republic of Korea Air Force and French Air and Space Force.

"We are here on Tinian because it provides a remote environment for us to train," said Capt. Bryan Griswold, 36th Contingency Response Squadron camp commander. "By coming out here, we're able to practice agile combat employment, to include everything we need to survive and operate geographically separated from our home unit."

This is done to further prepare multinational service members for potential challenges they could face. Training scenarios included a mass casualty event, requiring military members to operate during times of extreme crisis in a cohesive, integrated front.

"One way we become fully operationally capable is by rehearsing extreme scenarios such as aircraft crashes," said Royal Australian Air Force Warrant Officer David England, No. 383 Contingency Response Squadron unit safety advisor. "We know that we all have different terminology and procedures when it comes to these scenarios but through our combined training we are making it so those differences are smoothed out for a potential real world scenario."

Cope North is a proving ground for multinational partners. Each iteration strives to strengthen Alliances and partnerships and the warfighting advantage between the six nations.

"We really get to work on our team building and understanding of cultural differences," Griswold said. "Each time we do this, it provides us with insight on how we can improve our processes. Making us effective partners going forward." ***(PR)***

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONS LICENSING BOARD
P.O. Box 502078, Bldg., 1242 Pohnpei Court
Capitol Hill, Saipan, MP 96950
Tel No: (670) 664-4809 Fax: (670) 664-4814
Email: info@cnmilicensing.gov.mp • Website: www.cnmilicensing.gov.mp

Pursuant to P.L. 8-41, Section 11, Governor Arnold I. Palacios and Lt. Governor David M. Apatang, through the Health Care Professions Licensing Board (HCPLB) hereby gives notice that it will hold its regular monthly board meeting on Wednesday, February 21, 2024, at 8 a.m. on Saipan. The meeting will be held at the Board of Professional Licensing Conference Room, BPL Building on Capitol Hill.

AGENDA

I. Meeting Call to Order
II. Determination of Quorum
III. Review and Adoption of Agenda
IV. Review and Adoption of Minutes (01/17/2024)
V. Public Comments
VI. Chairperson's Report
VII. Director's Report
  1. **Localgov Update – via ZOOM Meeting**
  2. **FY2024 Annual Budget Call**
  3. **Dr. Song Rhim's Monitoring Report**
VIII. Investigator's Report
IX. Communications from the Governor's Office & Legislature
  A. Governor's Office
  1. **Re-Appointment of Dr. Marty Rohringer and Dr. Glenda George to the HCPLBoard**
  B. Legislature
  2. **Public Hearing Schedule for Dr. Glenda George to the HCPLB – February 16, 2024, 10:00 AM**
X. Old Business
  1. Proposed Regulations Report (Ad Hoc Committee – Chairperson: Dr. Glenda George)
    a.) Social Workers and Mental Health Counselors
XI. New Business
XII. Pending Applications for Board's Review
  A. New Application
  B. Renewal Application
XIII. Miscellaneous Business
XIV. Executive Session: The Board may vote to meet in executive session to consult with Counsel on pending or anticipated legal matters.
XV. Announcements
  A. Next Meeting Date
  B. Adjournment of Meeting

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WE WELCOME FOOD STAMPS.
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PLDT selects GTA's GNC iX Data Center as strategic Point of Presence in Guam

TAMUNING, Guam—GTA, the leading telecommunications and digital infrastructure provider in Guam, has announced that the GTA GNC iX Data Center is now a strategic Point of Presence for PLDT Global, a technology services company in the Philippines providing high quality communications infrastructure and innovative platforms to its global network of carriers, enterprise customers, and distribution partners. The new Guam PoP will provide PLDT Global with enhanced network performance, reduced latency, and route diversity, crucial factors for enterprises to meet the evolving demands of the digital age.

BUSINESSWIRE

GTA's CNC iX Data Center in Piti, Guam.

"We are excited to partner with PLDT Global. Guam stands at the crossroads of international connectivity, and with our latest PoP, we are unlocking unparalleled opportunities to bring more interconnection opportunities to our ecosystem of carriers across the APAC region for our partners," said Roland Certeza, president, and CEO of GTA. "GTA's GNC iX Data Center is increasingly appealing to carriers in need of an Asia Hub for IP transit, peering, and colocation to address the increasing requirements and growing operations that connect individuals, businesses, and the global community. The trust that major carriers place in our infrastructure is a testament to the quality of our Data Center and the benefits Guam provides with its close proximity to Asia. We look forward to a fruitful collaboration that will not only elevate PLDT Global's network capabilities but also contribute to the continued advancement of Guam as a prominent connectivity hub."

GTA's GNC iX Data Center offers a host of unparalleled benefits that align seamlessly with PLDT's commitment to delivering top-tier services. The facility's advanced security protocols, redundant power systems, and carrier-neutral ecosystem ensure uncompromised data integrity and reliability, meeting the stringent standards of the telecommunications industry. Furthermore, the strategic location of the GNC Data Center in Guam serves as a gateway to trans-pacific connectivity, providing unparalleled access to each of Guam's cable landing stations and related twelve (12) subsea cable systems with the ability to host content for the world's largest companies.

In expressing his enthusiasm for this partnership, Albert Villa-Real, president and CEO of PLDT Global, remarked, "Our collaboration with GTA epitomizes PLDT Global's vision of connecting people, businesses, and continents, fostering growth and innovation. By utilizing GTA's GNC iX Data Center as our new Point of Presence, PLDT Global is poised to deliver increased value to our customers, offering enhanced network performance and a diverse array of connectivity options." He further added, "This strategic alliance represents a transformative moment for PLDT Global, actively shaping the future landscape of global connectivity. We eagerly anticipate positive outcomes, solidifying our commitment to growth, innovation, and the advancement of global telecommunications."

The partnership between PLDT Global and GTA is set to propel the growth of Guam's data center industry, promoting the island as a regional hub for resilient, high-capacity connectivity and attracting new businesses to the area. With GTA's GNC Data Center serving as a key point of presence, Guam continues to solidify its position in the Asia Pacific region as an essential hub in global telecommunications.

About GTA

GTA provides complete communications services in Guam. These include local and long-distance telephone service, 3G, LTE, and 5G mobility service, High Speed Internet Access, Dedicated Ethernet, Carrier-Class High-Capacity Services over SONET and SDH networks, and advanced television, or IPTV. GTA operates a data center on Guam offering a secure, managed environment for customers who need an alternative site for business data storage. The company also runs Guam's first locally operated cable landing station and data center in Piti.

Based in Tamuning, Guam, GTA is a U.S. and locally owned company and locally managed. The company's website is www.gta.net. ***(Business Wire)***

COMMONWEALTH JUDICIARY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

Guma' Hustisia / Iimwal Aweewe / House of Justice
P.O. Box 502165 • Saipan, MP 96950
Telephone (670) 236-9700/9800 • Facsimile: (670) 236-9702
Website: www.NMIjudiciary.com

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Judiciary is seeking a highly motivated individual for the position of:

JUVENILE COORDINATOR
On the island of SAIPAN
Announcement # JVA24-009

DUTIES: The successful candidate will work under the direct supervision of the Presiding Judge and/or his/her designee, including, but not limited to, the Special Assistant to the Presiding Judge. The JC is responsible for researching, laying the groundwork for, and preparing to establish various specialty courts under the Juvenile Justice Program. The JC also acts as court liaison with various stakeholders to set up various specialty court programs under the juvenile docket. The JC is also responsible for partnering with community stakeholders to assess each juvenile in the juvenile justice system to identify and refer prospective participants to the appropriate specialty court program. The JC is the bridge between Juvenile Court and DCCA Division of Youth Services ("DYS") in all Juvenile matters. The duties of this position include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Research and draft legislation for various specialty courts under the Juvenile Justice Program ("specialty courts"), including juvenile mental health court, juvenile drug court, and juvenile DUI court.
- Research and draft policies and procedures for various specialty courts to be established under the Juvenile Justice Program;
- Coordinate, establish, and maintain strategic relationships, establishing parameters to build collaborative efforts with community stakeholders;
- Establish all processes and procedures to be implemented between the community stakeholders and the Juvenile Justice Program;
- Present research and findings to judges, justices, and Judicial Council regarding juvenile specialty courts;
- Assist with the planning, implementing, administrating, and monitoring services in accordance with applicable policies and procedures, judicial standards, and applicable statutes (local, state, and federal);
- Contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the specialty courts services under Juvenile Justice Program;
- Maintain and promote positive workflow with all agencies involved in the processing and distribution of Juvenile cases for prospective specialty court participants;
- Participate in staffing and hearings for juvenile cases;
- Coordinate referrals and the initial process for proper assessment, intake, admittance, and treatment services and case management;
- Communicate follow-up/requirements to the interdisciplinary team and collaborate with the interdisciplinary team to achieve optimal resource outcomes;
- Work with families to foster communication and act as a liaison between the specialty courts team and their case managers;
- Track and monitor referred juvenile cases;
- Develop, coordinate, and monitor record-keeping systems for effective program evaluation;
- Attend staff meetings, in-service training, workshops, and interagency conferences to coordinate services;
- Provide team members with assistance or training as necessary;
- Maintain current knowledge of best practices and national standards governing the administration of specialty courts for the benefit of the Judiciary;
- Maintain knowledge of the judicial system and its interrelationships with community stakeholders;
- Conduct program needs assessment and submits requests for capital expenditures and program enhancements where indicated;
- Maintain liaison and confer with state and federal agencies, private entities, non-profit organizations, and other community groups regarding the implementation of specific specialty courts;
- Draft and submit weekly , quarterly and/or annual reports on program activities and performance benchmarks;
- Prepare budget and program details for specialty courts; and
- Perform other duties as assigned.

QUALIFICATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS: The Candidate must have a high school diploma or equivalent AND must hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited U.S. university. Experience in a human services field(s) such as psychology, social work, sociology, criminology, criminal justice, judicial administration, the court system, or other similar field is preferred. Two (2) years of experience working as a case manager, counselor, or coordinator of related services is also preferred. Candidate must possess writing skills in: 1) policies and procedures; 2) participants' performance contracts; and 3) participants' handbook.

The successful candidate must be proficient using a personal computer, including Microsoft Office software suite, possess excellent written and oral communication skills, and be able to work individually and as part of a team. Candidate must maintain confidentiality and handle sensitive information.
Candidate must provide current police and traffic clearances and proof of eligibility to work in the CNMI. Must have a valid drivers' license and operate a court vehicle. Applicants given a conditional offer of employment with the CNMI Judiciary will be required to submit to urinalysis to screen for the illegal use of drugs prior to employment. "Illegal drug" means a substance whose use or possession is controlled by federal law but that is not being used or possessed under the supervision of a licensed health care professional. (Controlled substances are listed in Schedules I-V of 21 C.F.R. Part 1308.)

Education completed in foreign colleges or universities may be used to meet the job qualification requirements if the applicant can show that foreign education is comparable to education received in accredited educational institutions in the United States.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide such evidence when applying for Judiciary jobs. Education received in foreign colleges or universities will be considered if the candidate submits an evaluation of the coursework from: (a) an accredited U.S. college or university; or (b) a private professional organization specializing in interpretation of foreign educational credentials.

COMPENSATION AND TENURE: This position is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Presiding. The salary range will be $45,000 – $50,000 per annum.

INTERESTED PERSONS PERSONS Application forms are available at the Judiciary Administrative Office at the Guma Hustisia/Iimwal Aweewe/House of Justice in Susupe, or at the Superior Court offices on Kotten Tinian and Centron Hustisia in Rota during normal business hours except on weekends and holidays. Completed applications, cover letter, and three references should be submitted to:

NMI Judiciary
Human Resources
Guma' Hustisia/Iimwal Aweewe/House of Justice
P.O. Box 502165 Saipan, MP 96950
Tel. (670) 236-9818 • Cell. (670) 783-8592 • Fax. (670) 236-9702
hr.judiciary@NMIjudiciary.gov

This job announcement will remain open until filled and can be seen and a printable copy of the application downloaded at http://www.nmijudiciary.gov

The Judiciary reserves the right to rescind or cancel this JVA at any time without notice.

THE CNMI JUDICIARY IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER AND EMPLOYER.

[1]Juvenile Court hearings are held Mondays at 2:30 p.m. The JC is responsible for compiling the reports submitted by the parties and DYS for review prior to the hearings, typically by Friday afternoon or Monday morning at the latest.
[2]The following organizations evaluate foreign educational credentials for employment and other purposes. All operate on a fee based on the extent of the education to be evaluated; applicants shall bear the cost of evaluation.
(a) Credentials Evaluation Service P.O. Box 24679 Los Angeles, CA 90024
(b) Education Equivalency Evaluation World Education Services P.O. Box 745 Old Chelsea Station New York, NY 10011
(c) Education Credential Evaluators, Inc. P.O. Box 17499 Milwaukee, WI 53217
(d) International Consultants of Delaware, Inc. 914 Pickett Lane Newark, DE 19711
(e) Foundation for International Services, Inc. P.O. Box 230278 Portland, OR 97223.
While the Judiciary offers these addresses as information to applicants who request assistance in obtaining an evaluation of foreign education, these services are not preferred over others which may exist.

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
CUC-RFP-24-014
PURCHASE AND INSTALLATION OF A NEW 2MW GENSET UNIT FOR ROTA POWER PLANT

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC), is soliciting competitive sealed proposals from qualified Contractors or Vendors for the purchase and installation of a new genset for the Rota Power Plant located in Songsong, Rota. The purchase of and installation of the new genset with approximately 2MW of total net output will improve CUC current power generation capacity needed to sustain critical electrical services to the community of Rota.

The RFP Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration for one RFP package set. Prospective proposers must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division by **March 8, 2024** to be considered.

A Pre-proposal Conference will be held on **February 22, 2024 at 9:00 AM (CHST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and five (5) hard copies of your submission must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **"CUC-RFP-24-014, Purchase and Installation of a 2MW New Genset Unit for the Rota Power Plant"** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 A.M.(ChST) on March 19, 2024.** Proposals mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before the due date and time.

All Offerors are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the Offeror due to lack of information or understanding of the proposal requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a proposal or supply under the contract.

Discussions may be conducted with responsible proposers for the purpose of clarification and to ensure full understanding of, and responsiveness to solicitation requirements. Proposers shall be accorded fair and equal treatment. There shall be no disclosure of any information derived from proposals submitted by competing proposers.

All responses to this RFP should take into account any and all taxes which will become the obligation of the proposer awarded a contract.

This Request for Proposal does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals in anticipation of a contract. This request and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations. The contractor shall be required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered prospective proposers and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on February 27, 2024,** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org, with a copy to Alvin King, CUC Rota Resident Manager at alvin.king@cucgov.org, Richard Cano, CUC Power Generation Manager at richard.cano@cucgov.org and Marcela Tenorio, Senior Administrative Technician at marcela.tenorio@-cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for any reason and to waive any defects in said proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All proposals shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Radewagen meets with Coast Guard commandant Fagan

CONTRBUTED PHOTO

Delegate Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen (R-A. Samoa) at the Ronald Reagan Shipyard Authority.

PAGO PAGO, American Samoa—Delegate Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen (R-A. Samoa) met Tuesday with the commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, Adm. Linda Fagan, who is responsible for all Coast Guard operations including 42,000 active-duty, 7,000 reserve, and 8,700 civilian personnel supported by 21,000 Coast Guard Auxiliary volunteers, to hear about the Coast Guard's key role in American Samoa and the Pacific region, and tour Pago Pago Harbor's shipyard facilities.

"I'm delighted that Adm. Fagan was able to visit American Samoa in person, and I appreciate her historic leadership in this very important security role for us in American Samoa," said Radewagen. "I am an advocate of an increased or permanent Coast Guard presence in Pago Pago Harbor, and I am happy the admiral saw our excellent natural harbor in person. The Coast Guard is a major element in the U.S. commitment to the Indo-Pacific region in these times, including here in the South Pacific."

"I talk about the Coast Guard role often, as it secures many thousands of miles of coastal waters, extending far out into the Pacific, including the safety of travelers, trading partners, and the fishing fleet our economy depends on," continued Radewagen. "The white hulls and famed stripe emblem of the cutters are iconic, with a history dating back to beginning development in the President John Kennedy administration. I've had Coast Guard briefings and updates over the years, and I so appreciate all that our nation's Coast Guardsmen do for us." ***(PR)***

CONTRBUTED PHOTO

Delegate Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen (R-A. Samoa) and U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan speaking on a rainy day in American Samoa.

CONTRBUTED PHOTO

Delegate Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen (R-A. Samoa) takes part in a walking briefing on Pago Pago Harbor's shipyard activities.

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

NAME OF EMPLOYER: Kang Corporation **POSITION:** Accountant **NO. OF VACANCIES:** 1

JOB DESCRIPTION: General Duties: Analyzes financial information and prepare financial reports to determine or maintain records of assets, liabilities, profits and loss, tax liability or other financial activities within the organization; and Performs professional operating or cost accounting work requiring knowledge of the theory and practice of recording, classifying, examining, and analyzing the data and records of financial transactions. Specific Duties: Analyzes the effects of transactions upon account relationships; Evaluates alternative means of treating transactions; Plans the way account structures should be developed or modified; Assures the adequacy of the accounting system as the basis for reporting to management; Considers the need for new or changed controls; Projects accounting data to show the effects of proposed plans on capital investments, income, cash position, and overall financial condition; Interprets the meaning of accounting records, reports, and statements; Advises management on accounting matters; and Recommends improvements, adaptations, or revisions in the accounting system and procedures.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:
EDUCATION: Must have a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting.
EXPERIENCE: Must have at least 24 months of relevant work experience as an Accountant.
JOB SITE: Amare Pl Pale Arnold Road, Chalan Laulau, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
HOW TO APPLY: Submit or mail comprehensive professional resume and supporting credentials to:

KANG HEE LIM
President
KANG CORPORATION
Office Address: Amare Pl Pale Arnold Road, Chalan Laulau Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 503053, Saipan, MP 96950 • Email Address: kangparts@hotmail.com
Telephone Number: Tel. 1(670) 235-9369

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality
Division of Coastal Resources Management
P.O. Box 501304, Saipan, MP 96950
Tel: (670) 664-8300; Fax: (670) 664-8315
www.dcrm.gov.mp

Eli D. Cabrera
Administrator

Richard V. Salas
Director, DCRM

NOTICE OF CRM PUBLIC HEARING

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS (DPW)
ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS
RT. 310 (TAPOCHAO ROAD) / RT. 38 (CHALAN GALAIDI)
AND RT. 317 (GUALO RAI ROAD)

*****

CANAAN REALTY, LLC
CONSTRUCTION OF 42 RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND
COMMERCIAL COMPLEX BUILDING

The Division of Coastal Resources Management (DCRM) will be holding a public hearing for the following three projects:

CRM Major Siting Application No. SMS-2024-024 – The Department of Public Works (DPW) is proposing to construct road improvements on Route 310 (Tapochao Road) within the Mt. Tapochao area and Route 38 (Chalan Galaidi) within the Galaidi/Navy Hill area of Saipan. The improvements for Route 310 stretches about 2.1 miles south from the Route 310/Route 312 intersection in Capitol Hill pass Coral Island Condominiums, and up to the foot of the Mt. Tapochao lookout. Route 38 improvements stretches about 0.25 miles downhill from Chalan Galaidi to Navy Hill Road.

CRM Major Siting Application No. SMS-2024-025 – The Department of Public Works (DPW) is proposing to construct road improvements on Route 317, also known as Gualo Rai Road beginning at the intersection of Route 33 (Beach Road) to Historia Place within the Gualo Rai area in Saipan. Total area to be improved is about 0.59 miles.

CRM Major Siting Application No. SMS-2023-102 – Canaan Realty, LLC is proposing to construct 42 residential units and one commercial complex building in As Lito, Saipan. The proposed project will be situated on six privately leased properties identified as Lot No. 361-6, Tract No. 22553, Tract No. 22554-2NEW, Lot No. 361-5, Lot No. 361-R4, and Tract No. 2254-3.

The public hearing for these projects is scheduled on **Wednesday, March 6, 2024, at 5:00PM, at the DCRM Learning Center 3rd Floor, Suite 301, Gualo Rai Center, Chalan Pale Arnold Road in Lower Gualo Rai, Saipan.**

DCRM continues to provide virtual participation via video conferencing through Zoom link: *https://zoom.us/j (Meeting ID: 6706648315).* Our Zoom meeting access code may change, please call the DCRM Permitting Office at (670) 664-8300 for connection assistance at least one-day prior to the public hearing date.

If you are unable to attend in-person or virtually, written comments may be submitted to the DCRM Permitting Office, Suite 305, Gualo Rai Center, Middle Road, Gualo Rai, Saipan, or mailed to the Division of Coastal Resources Management, P.O. Box 501304, or sent by fax at 664-8315, or by email at permitting@dcrm.gov.mp. The project file is open for review and comments during regular business hours from 7:30 A.M. – 4:30 P.M., Monday through Friday. All written and oral comments received by DCRM will be included as part of the permit application records and will be considered in any decisions concerning the proposed project. Please contact Ms. Sam Sablan at the DCRM Permitting Office at 664-8300/1 or via email at permitting@dcrm.gov.mp if you have any questions or would like to learn more about the proposed DPW road improvement projects for Routes 310, 38, and 317 or the proposed Canaan Realty, LLC project.

/s/ Richard V. Salas
Director
Division of Coastal Resources Management

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Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER
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Mark Rabago EDITOR
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com

MEMBER

The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

If only Taylor Swift were dating the national debt

If only Taylor Swift were dating the national debt.

On Sunday, the world's attention turned to Las Vegas, as the region hosted its first Super Bowl. Despite some national naysayers, it was an unbridled success. Las Vegas accommodated and entertained fans and celebrities alike. About the only thing that disappointed was the low-scoring start to the game.

Once again, Las Vegas showed it is the entertainment capital of the world.

But entertainment doesn't last forever. Football fans enjoyed the game and left to return to their normal lives. The Kansas City Chiefs celebrated their victory in style, but the off-season is already here. Las Vegas officials handed off Super Bowl hosting duties to New Orleans.

This is a normal rhythm of life. Along with fun, there are responsibilities and hard decisions. One of the marks of adulthood is balancing those competing interests. The American public isn't showing this maturity. Tens of millions of people know the latest details of Swift—prominently featured on Sunday's TV broadcast—and her boyfriend, Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce. But they have little interest discussing something much more important to all Americans—the national debt.

Last week, the Congressional Budget Office released its forecast of America's fiscal future. The situation is bleak. This fiscal year, the deficit is projected to hit $1.6 trillion. For context, the total U.S. budget didn't even reach that number until the late 1990s. The annual deficit is projected to continue increasing and reach $2.6 trillion by 2034.

Debt held by the public will soon hit 100% of gross domestic product. At this pace, it will reach 116% of GDP in 2034, "the highest level ever recorded." Even the massive financial strains of World War II didn't put the country on such poor fiscal footing.

The deficit isn't growing because taxes are too low. Federal government revenues are currently at 17.5% of GDP. After a one-year dip, that's expected to rise to around 17.9%.

No, America is bleeding red ink because its political class is addicted to spending other people's money. "After 2028, growth in spending on programs for elderly people and rising net interest costs drive up outlays, which reach 24.1% of GDP by 2034," the report notes.

That gap, which is more than 6% of GDP, is a major problem. It should be at the top of the public's mind, pressuring our elected leaders to propose and vigorously debate various solutions.

Instead, too many apathetic Americans ignore it, caught up in the latest pop culture phenomenon. Perhaps someone should pay Swift to wear a pin with the national debt clock on it.

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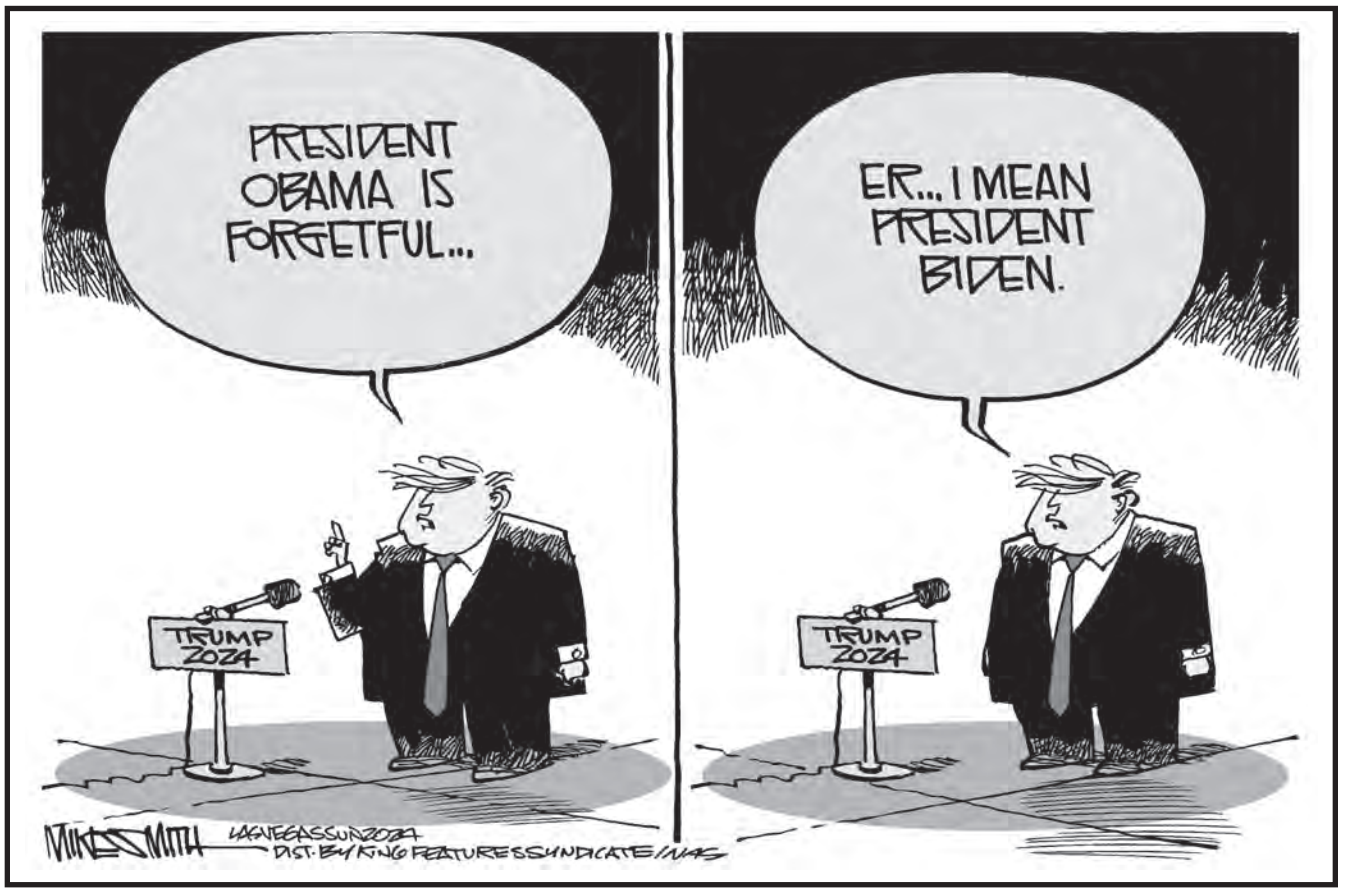


Kuwaiti tourists discover Saipan

By WALT GOODRIDGE
Special to Saipan Tribune

Walt F.J. Goodridge, originally from the island of Jamaica, is an author residing on Saipan.

I had a unique opportunity to meet, tour and interview Wesam (WEE-sam) Behbehani and her sister, Weam (WEE-am), from Kuwait. Wesam, who focuses on off-the-beaten-path destinations, provides vicarious travel enjoyment to her 15,000 mostly Kuwaiti Instagram followers who are unable to travel due to prohibitive logistics and/or expense. This is the transcript from a short interview.

Q: Tell us what brings you to this side of the world.

WB: My sister and I are on a trip through [the] Micronesia islands. We started from Palau, and this is our current stop here on Saipan. And then, we are heading to Guam, and then to Marshall [Islands].

Q: And you are from?

WB: Kuwait.

Q: I can almost assure you that we've never gotten many visitors from Kuwait. Why Saipan?

WB: I am interested in history [and] culture. I heard about the beautiful nature of this island, so I knew it would be a pleasure for me to focus on the history part and see it in reality.

Q: And you just completed your tour of Saipan.

WB: Yes, with the best guide [on] Saipan, because it was not only touristic parts, it was nature, a lot of documentary, sightseeing and [it] gave me a meaning for my trip.

Q: Now, you're not simply doing this for your own enjoyment and education, correct? You have an Instagram channel that's popular in Kuwait.

WB: Yes, I post all my travel experience to my channel, which is @rosy_path. I've been to Africa, Asia. ...Every year, I spend my time going to new destinations.

I don't want to repeat destinations.

Q: Now that you've seen it in person, what do you think of Saipan?

WB: Beautiful island! Nice people. Very rich in nature, sightseeing, history...[you can find] everything [on] Saipan!

Q: Any words for the people of Saipan?

WB: I wish a prosperous life for everybody. Oh, and I say, *"Hafa Adai!"* and...I love Saipan!

P.S. from Wesam: I would ask the people of Saipan to come to Kuwait. You are very welcome to my homeland, and see and discover Kuwait. You will enjoy it very much! تيوكلاب هلا مكاي ح : "Come to Kuwait!"

Watch the video of the interview on YouTube @discoversaipan? watch?v=xeDTYggU8f0 and start following Wesam on Instagram (rosy_path) to be notified when she releases her Saipan adventure in a few weeks.

WALT GOODRIDGE

Wesam Behbehani, right, seen here with sister, Weam, is a Kuwaiti travel blogger (Instagram @rosy_path) who focuses on off-the-beaten-path destinations and provides vicarious travel enjoyment to her 15,000 mostly Kuwaiti followers who are unable to travel due to prohibitive logistics and expense.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

History won't forget GOP's bow to Putin over Ukraine

By TRUDY RUBIN
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Trudy Rubin is a columnist and editorial-board member for the Philadelphia Inquirer. *Readers may write to her at: P*hiladelphia Inquirer, *P.O. Box 8263, Philadelphia, Pa. 19101, or by email at trubin@phillynews.com.*

History will record this as the week the GOP formally kowtowed to Vladimir Putin.

This was the week when otherwise sane Republicans, who'd spent months drafting a bipartisan Senate bill that linked major border reforms to more military aid for Ukraine, threw in the towel.

These senators abandoned the bill under heavy pressure from Donald Trump, who prefers to keep the border boiling as an election issue. Far worse, Trump has shown he buys Putin's rationale for crushing Ukraine.

What's so disgusting about the cave-in is that most of these senators—unlike the mindless MAGA mob in the House or the blinkered Trump—understand the strategic risk of abandoning Kyiv.

On Monday, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell urged his Republican colleagues to show strength by backing the bill—and Ukraine—because "our adversaries, Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran are working together to undermine us." Yet, he and his colleagues suddenly decided to swallow an aid cutoff with hardly a dissenter.

"We cannot walk away from Ukraine now," President Joe Biden said on Tuesday." If we don't stop Putin's appetite for power … he won't limit himself to Ukraine."

Craven GOP senators effectively responded: "We don't care. Drop dead, Ukraine."

If you think I'm exaggerating the cost of the GOP's kowtow, consider the following: Trump insists he can solve the Ukraine war directly with Putin in 24 hours. He has made clear he supports Russia keeping large parts of Ukraine that it acquired by invading and bombing its neighbor.

Displaying total ignorance of Ukrainian history, the former president has said publicly that Russian-speaking areas of Ukraine rightly belong to Russia. Clearly, he has no idea that, before Russia invaded, much of Ukraine was Russian-speaking, having been under Soviet rule for decades. Yet, Putin has bombed Russian-speaking regions relentlessly, killing more Russian speakers than anyone since Hitler, because these Ukrainians do not want to live under harsh Russian imperial rule.

Putin has played Trump for a fool, praising Trump's 24-hour pledge fulsomely last September. When asked on NBC's Meet the Press whether he welcomed Putin's support, Trump said: "Well, I like that he said that. Because that means what I'm saying is right."

It's no accident that Trump acolyte Tucker Carlson has been roaming around Moscow this week, apparently invited to interview Putin. Carlson, as you will recall, frequently praises Putin and is often featured on Russian television.

Writing about Carlson's Moscow visit, the Daily Beast's Russia expert, Julia Davis, who closely follows all Moscow media, wrote: "Russia's state TV stooges [talk show hosts] believe a Tucker Carlson-Putin interview will boost Putin at home and help restore Trump to the White House."

Indeed, the English-language Moscow Times quoted an unnamed Moscow official as saying of the Carlson visit: "Access to an American audience through Carlson during the heated struggle between Biden and Trump is again an opportunity to exert that proverbial influence on the U.S. election, given Carlson's huge audience."

No doubt, Putin is also delighted at a prospective U.S. aid cutoff at a critical moment when Ukraine is running short of everything.

In WhatsApp conversations with Ukrainian fighters on the front lines this week, I have heard repeated stories of desperate shortages of ammunition. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said two weeks ago in Kyiv that Ukraine couldn't survive without U.S. help.

And yet, contrary to claims by Trump and MAGA acolytes, Ukraine is not losing. Its military has made amazing progress. Without a navy, it is pushing back Russia's Black Sea fleet via missiles and Ukrainian-made sea drones.

If the United States and Germany sent long-range missiles, more ammo, and air defenses—something Biden will be discussing with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz this Friday in Washington—Ukraine could make further progress in 2024.

Also contrary to MAGA disinformation, Europe already sends Ukraine twice as much aid as does the United States, but does not have the volume and many of the types of weapons that Kyiv desperately needs.

Nor will a cutoff of Ukraine aid result in more aid for the southern border or for poor U.S. communities—another falsehood spread by the bill's opponents. In reality, most U.S. aid to Ukraine goes to the Pentagon to purchase new weapons while Ukraine is sent older models.

By dooming the bipartisan border-Ukraine bill (which also contains aid for Israel and Taiwan), the GOP is sinking the best chance for border reform in decades. The bill was endorsed by the Wall Street Journal's conservative editorial board, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Border Patrol Council, and—until they were intimidated by Trump—many Republican legislators in Congress.

In standing by and letting Russia dismember Ukraine, the GOP has sent a message of profound weakness to Putin and his dictator cronies in Beijing, Tehran, and Pyongyang.

The Russian dictator need only wait until (as he hopes) Trump is elected, with the expectation that the GOP leader cares nothing about what Putin does in Europe. Nor does Trump care what happens to America's most important military alliance, NATO, which he has said he will withdraw from if he returns to the White House.

In other words—as the world sees this week—the GOP won't stop Putin, who will feel free to nibble around Poland, the Baltics, the North Sea, the Arctic, East Asia, and the Middle East. Already, he is reportedly helping Tehran with nuclear weapons technology in return for Iran's sending drones to help Moscow destroy Ukraine.

The lesson Putin has learned over the last few days will be absorbed by China, Iran, and North Korea. With his threats, Trump is capable of silencing those in his party who understand the dangers posed by dictators to America.

"History is watching," Biden said Tuesday. "The failure to support Ukraine at this critical moment will never be forgotten."

The question at hand is whether Biden can still find a way to funnel aid to Ukraine despite GOP blindness, before Trump has ensured Ukraine's demise.

TINIAN PIKA FEST

A Melody Medley Rap for Pika Fest

LITERARY NOOK
By JOEY CONNOLLY
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Joey aka Pepe Batbon Connolly is a retired educator who taught in the CNMI, NOLA, and LVNV. He is a sonnet practitioner who enjoys stargazing.

To Honorable Mayor Edwin Aldan, *yan taotao Tinian, yan todudu* Pizza Fest guests,

For Tinian Pika Fest friends, I had full intention of reading the following on opening day, Friday the 16th, of Pika Fest. However due to my being diagnosed with three herniated discs in the lower lumbar region of my spine two days ago and the editor of the Saipan Tribune down with flu, I think its best we cancel the trip. We'll come back for the Taga's birthday.

I have fond memories of past Pika Fests: Watching Ms. Ayuyu win against all competitors in eating the most boonie peppers. I thought I'd gag and vomit if I tried to eat that many Pika hamburgers in a short period of time. Then watching the competitors chow them down and not one of them puked.

I hope some of the military personnel on island join in the fun competition. Here are some instructions how readers can have fun with the following melody medley rap poem:

Read the excerpted lyrics from well-known songs. If you know or recognize the tune, sing the following short message about Pika Fest using the same tune and sing the words aloud.

Have fun and *biba* Pika Fest!

Pika Fest Melody Medley Rap

"Sugar in the morning, sugar in the evening, sugar at supper time, be my little sugar and I'll love you all the time…"

Peppers in the morning, peppers in the evening, peppers all the time, be my little pika and I'll eat you all the time.

"Every time it rains it rains pennies from heaven, don't you know each cloud contains pennies from heaven"

Every time it rains peppers grow pika from heaven, don't you know every pepper bush grows mas pikaka from heaven.

"I Can't Get No Satisfaction"—Rolling Stones song.

I can't get no boonie pepper but I try and I try…

'Rasta Man Vibrations, yah positive live if you want to live'

Pika Fest Vibrations yeah positive, eat if you want to live

"I shot the sheriff but I did not shoot the deputy."

I ate the peppers and I love what they do to me,
though they are mampus pika they are not new to me.

And for all the marijuana farmers a parody of a 1920s classic song, *If You're a Viper:*

"Dreamed about a reefer five feet long, a little bit hot but not too strong, you'll be high before too long, if you're a viper, sssss."

Dreamed about a pepper five feet long, very very hot,
and very strong, you can't go wrong, you'll be pika
before too long, while you're at Pika Fest. *Biba.*

I was named Tinian Poet Laureate in 2018 by then-mayor Joey Patrick San Nicolas. J.P. San Nicolas and his wife, Connie Manglona San Nicolas, are both my former students. Current Mayor Edwin Aldan and his spouse, Rosita King Aldan, are also both my former students. I am very proud of all my students who serve and have served in the CNMI government, and Tinian Municipal Council, including Sen. Jude Hofschneider, Sen, Henry San Nicolas, Rep. Patrick San Nicolas, Municipal Council members Ann Marie Cruz San Nicolas, Steven P. Cabrera, Joseph Santos, and Patrick A. Manglona. I appreciate all the work they and *todu taotao* Tinian *familia* do to make Tinian a better place. This year 2024, I celebrate coming to Tinian 40 years ago in August 1984. Si yu'us ma'ase from Pepe Batbon!

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

No unsolved mystery

Much hoopla has been made over the latest unconfirmed sighting of Amelia Earhart's airplane that disappeared in the Pacific ocean in 1937. Explorers continue to spend millions and millions of dollars trying to solve a mystery that is not a mystery at all.

Several locals became aware of her presence on Saipan and later reported on what they had seen with their own eyes or heard with their own ears. These select few people, including my father, were all credible citizens with no reason to lie or fabricate a story.

My father told me that in 1937 he was working at the dock where he saw a Caucasian woman with short hair arrive on a Japanese cargo ship. She was placed in the old Japanese jail where a short time later she died of dysentery. She was buried in Garapan behind where STaR Water company is today. Her Lockheed Electra was pushed off the Agingan Point dumpsite with other military equipment and sits off the cliff there until today.

I cordially invite and encourage these would-be do-gooders to come to Saipan and search the old military dumpsite off Agingan Point which is only hundreds of feet deep and near the cliff line. It would be faster and cheaper.

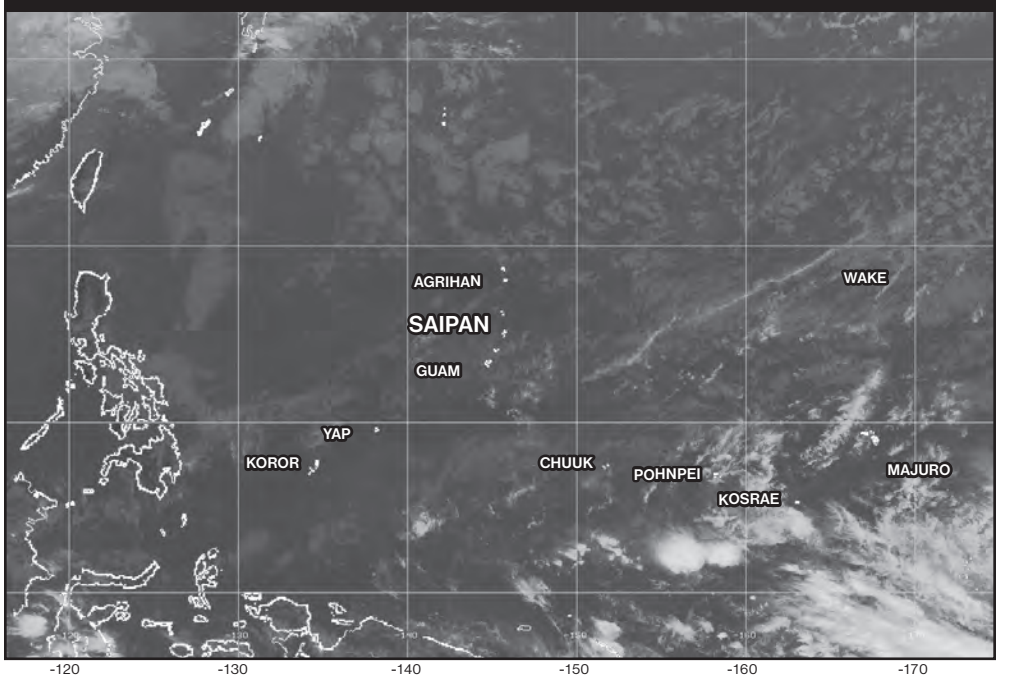
Stanley T. Torres
via email

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
Breezy. Mostly cloudy with isolated showers. east winds 20 to 25 mph.	Partly sunny with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.
85 76°	85 76°	83 77°	83 77°	83 77°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 5:27 AM THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite imagery indicates scattered showers are crossing the region, mainly near Guam and Rota. Altimetry shows seas are in the 10 to 11 foot range. The water temperature at Tanapag is 81 degrees.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	84° / 77°
Palau	Thunderstorms	84° / 77°
Yap	Partly Cloudy	85° / 79°
Chuuk	Showers	84° / 80°
Pohnpei	Thunderstorms	84° / 79°
Kosrae	Thunderstorms	84° / 79°
Majuro	Partly Cloudy	85° / 79°

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Fair	80° / 62°
Beijing	Fair	52° / 28°
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	74° / 64°
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	77° / 69°
London	Cloudy	57° / 53°
Los Angeles	Clear	64° / 51°
Manila	Mostly Cloudy	90° / 75°
Melbourne	Partly Cloudy	71° / 54°
Miami	Fair	75° / 58°
New York	Fair	38° / 30°
Osaka	Mostly Cloudy	65° / 54°
Paris	Clear	60° / 51°
Busan	Partly Cloudy	63° / 50°
Rome	Sunny	54° / 30°
Salem	Cloudy	76° / 61°
San Francisco	Cloudy	57° / 51°
Seoul	Rain and Snow	64° / 37°
Tokyo	Partly Cloudy	70° / 46°
Washington, DC	Clear	46° / 37°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:41 AM	6:20 PM
Saturday	6:41 AM	6:21 PM
Sunday	6:40 AM	6:21 PM
Monday	6:40 AM	6:21 PM
Tuesday	6:39 AM	6:22 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	11:18 AM	-	-
Saturday	-	12:34 AM	12:05 PM
Sunday	-	1:33 AM	12:56 PM
Monday	-	2:31 AM	1:50 PM
Tuesday	-	3:26 AM	2:45 PM

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
12:56 AM	High Tide	1.41
6:19 AM	Low Tide	0.80
12:06 PM	High Tide	1.77
7:41 PM	Low Tide	-0.03

NEWS DESK For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235,3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF FEBRUARY 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

OZ626/703	3:10AM	10:30PM	4, 7 via ICN
7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily
OZ626	3:10AM	6:55AM	4,7
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily
7C3461	2:40PM	6:45PM	Daily Feb 7-16 only
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
OZ702/625	12:05PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6 via ICN
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3462	11:15PM	1:30PM+1	Daily Feb 7-16 only
7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3462	08:00AM	1:30PM	Daily Feb 7-16 only
7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
OZ625	8:20PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6
7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

4 new seamounts discovered in the high seas

SCHMIDT OCEAN INSTITUTE

Silhouetted in front of a map of Puerto Rico, Santiago Herrera (Principal Investigator, Lehigh University) gives a seminar to scientists and crew to familiarize them with the subject matter of the cruise.

VALPARAISO, Chile—The crew of Schmidt Ocean Institute's research vessel *Falkor 2* discovered four underwater mountains—the tallest of which is over 1.5 miles high—on a January transit from Golfito, Costa Rica, to Valparaiso, Chile, the organization announced recently.

The new seamounts, which range in size from approximately 1,591 meters (5,220 feet) to 2,681 meters (8,796 feet), add to the crew's discovery last November of an underwater mountain that was twice the height of the Burj Khalifa at 1,600 meters (5,259 feet) in international waters off Guatemala.

Using multibeam mapping, Schmidt Ocean Institute's marine technicians and trained hydrographic experts, John Fulmer and Tomer Ketter, confirmed that the seafloor features had not been previously included in any bathymetric database. The seamounts were found as the technicians plotted a course to examine gravity anomalies during the transit from Costa Rica to Chile. Changes in the shape of the seafloor appear as very slight shifts in the Ocean surface; a deep trench will cause a slight depression, and a mountain can create an almost imperceptible bump on top of the Ocean. These subtle clues can help experts make discoveries and create better, more detailed maps of the seafloor.

"We were fortunate enough to be able to plan an opportunistic mapping route using these gravity anomalies in satellite altimetry data," said Fulmer. "Examining gravity anomalies is a fancy way of saying we looked for bumps on a map, and when we did, we located these very large seamounts while staying on schedule for our first science expedition in Chile at the start of this year."

Whenever sea conditions permit, the crew collects mapping data as the research vessel moves, or transits, from one location to another. Since 2012, scientists on Schmidt Ocean Institute's research vessels *Falkor* and *Falkor 2* have mapped about 1.5 million square kilometers and discovered 29 seamounts, hills, and trenches. Underwater mountains and trenches often host deep-sea coral reefs, sponges, and anemones living alongside organisms that find food, shelter, and a rocky surface to cling to along mountain slopes.

"A map is a fundamental tool for understanding our planet—locating seamounts almost always leads us to understudied biodiversity hotspots," said Dr. Jyotika Virmani, executive director of Schmidt Ocean Institute. "Every time we find these bustling seafloor communities, we make incredible new discoveries and advance our knowledge of life on Earth."

The absence of detailed underwater topography, or bathymetric data, hinders the ability to manage marine resources sustainably, safely navigate vessels at sea, and safeguard coastal communities. Schmidt Ocean Institute is a partner of The Nippon Foundation-GEBCO Seabed 2030 Project—an ambitious effort accelerating ocean mapping efforts and working toward mapping the entire seafloor by 2030.

"These incredible discoveries by Schmidt Ocean Institute underscore the importance of a complete map of the seabed in our quest for understanding Earth's final frontier," said Jamie McMichael-Phillips, project director of Seabed 2030. "With 75 percent of the ocean still to be mapped, there is much to be uncovered. Ocean mapping is crucial to our understanding of the planet and, in turn, our ability to ensure its protection and sustainable management."

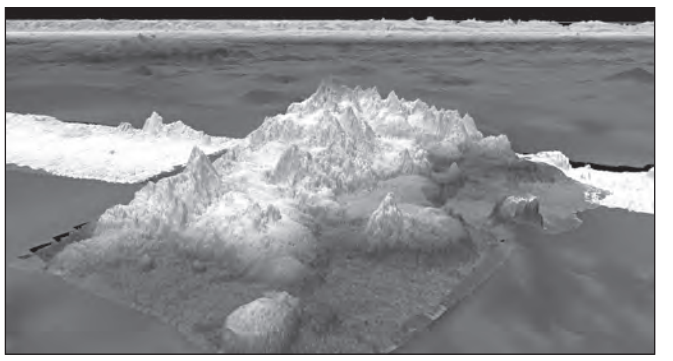
SCHMIDT OCEAN INSTITUTE

Research Vessel *Falkor (too)*, photographed during an expedition testing new high-resolution mapping methods. Seafloor mapping is integral to oceanographic research. Bathymetric data illustrate the seafloor's depth, contours, and physical features, and it is often the first essential step in planning a successful submersible operation.

About the organizations

Schmidt Ocean Institute was established in 2009 by Eric and Wendy Schmidt to catalyze the discoveries needed to understand our ocean, sustain life, and ensure the health of our planet through the pursuit of impactful scientific research and intelligent observation, technological advancement, open sharing of information, and public engagement, all at the highest levels of international excellence. For more information, visit www.schmidtocean.org.

The Nippon Foundation-GEBCO Seabed 2030 Project (Seabed 2030) is a pioneering initiative accelerating ocean mapping efforts. The Project coordinates and oversees the sourcing and compilation of bathymetric data from different parts of the world's ocean through its five data centers into the freely available GEBCO grid. For more information, visit seabed2030.org. ***(PR)***



SCHMIDT OCEAN INSTITUTE

The third of four seamounts discovered by mapping experts on board R/V *Falkor 2* is 1,644 meters in height.

DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT
REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

ITB NO.: RFP24-BECQ/DEQ-42400031

SUBMISSION DATE: MARCH 18, 2024
TIME: 10:00 A.M.

"TO CONDUCT CONTINUNING EDUCATION UNIT TRAINING FOR WATER OPERATORS IN THE FIELD OF WATER TREATMENT (LEVELS 1 THROUGH 4) AND WATER DISTRIBUTION (LEVELS 1 THROUGH 4) ON A QUARTERLY BASIS FOR A PERIOD OF ONE (1) YEAR WITH POSSIBILITY OF RENEWAL THEREAFTER"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR SELF SERVICE PORTAL (https://selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BLDG NO. 12552, ANATAHAN DRIVE, CAPTIOL HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS RFP CAN BE MADE TO THE BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENTAL & COASTAL QUALITY BY MARCH 8, 2024, TO MRS. ZABRINA S. CRUZ VIA EMAIL AT zabrina.shai@becq.gov.mp

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ RICHARD V. SALAS
ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, BECQ

/S/ BRIEN S. NICHOLAS JR.
ACTING DIRECTOR, PS

COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY
CNMI GOVERNMENT
Man Office: SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 2nd Floor Arrival Bldg.
P.O. BOX 501055 • SAIPAN • MP 96950|
Phone: (670) 237-6500/1 • Fax: (670) 234-5962
Website: www.cnmiports.com

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION STATEMENTS FOR ARCHITECTURAL/ENGINEERING DESIGN SERVICES

FRANCISCO C. ADA/SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT TERMINAL ROOF LEAK REPAIRS
Project No. CPA-SA-001-24

The Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, CPA is soliciting statements of professional qualifications from interested consultants for Architectural and Engineering (A/E) Design Services for the Terminal Roof Leak Repairs Project at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Project No. CPA-SA-001-24.

The project is being funded by the Commonwealth Ports Authority and is in accordance and compliance with CPA's Procurement Rules and Regulations, Section 40-50-202, Architect-Engineer Design and Construction Management Services.

The Request for Qualification (RFQ) Package is available at CPA's Administration Office, 2nd floor of the arrival terminal at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport. No fee is required for obtaining the RFQ package. Electronic copies may be made available upon written request to Ms. Wendi Prater at wprater@cnmiports.com or Ms. Sheri Llagas at receptionist@cnmiports.com.

Questions regarding this request must be submitted to Ms. Prater, CPA's Executive Assistant/Project Manager, via email to wprater@cnmiports.com or hand delivered to the CPA Administration Office, by no later than 5:00 p.m. CHST, Friday, March 8, 2024.

The statements of professional qualification will be evaluated based on the criteria available in the RFQ package.

Interested Consultants are requested to submit one (1) original, four (4) copies and one (1) electronic version in .pdf of their statements of professional qualifications no later than **5:00 p.m. CHST, FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024**. Statements of qualification must be presented by a combination of both brochures and the use of current U.S. Government Standard Form 330.

The CPA reserves the right to reject any or all statements of professional qualification for any reason, if in its sole opinion to do so would be in its best interest.

/s/ LEO B. TUDELA
Executive Director

Date: February 12, 2024

COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY
MAIN OFFICE: SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 2ND FLOOR ARRIVAL BLDG.
PO BOX 501055•SAIPAN•MP•96950
PHONE: (1-670) 237-6500/1 • FAX: (1-670) 234-5962
WEBSITE: WWW.CNMIPORTS.COM

AMENDED REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION STATEMENTS FOR ARCHITECTURAL/ENGINEERING DESIGN AND PLANNING SERVICES

SAIPAN HARBOR DREDGING PROJECT
PORT OF SAIPAN
PROJECT NO. CPA-SS-002-24

The Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, CPA is soliciting statements of professional qualifications from interested Consultants for Architectural and Engineering (A/E) Design and Planning Services for the Saipan Harbor Dredging Project at the Port of Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Project No. CPA-SS-002-24.

The project is being funded by the U.S. Maritime Administration and is in accordance and compliance with CPA's Procurement Rules and Regulations, Section 40-50-202, Architect-Engineer Design and Construction Management Services.

The Request for Qualification (RFQ) Package is available at CPA's Administration Office, 2nd floor of the arrival terminal at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport. No fee is required for obtaining the RFQ package. Electronic copies may be made available upon written request to Ms. Wendi Prater at wprater@cnmiports.com or Ms. Sheri Llagas at receptionist@cnmiports.com.

Questions regarding this request for qualification statements must be submitted to Ms. Prater, CPA's Executive Assistant/Project Manager, via email to wprater@cnmiports.com or hand delivered to the CPA Administration Office, by no later than 5:00 p.m. CHST, Friday, February 16, 2024.

The statements of professional qualification will be evaluated based on the criteria available in the RFQ package.

Interested Consultants are requested to submit one (1) original, four (4) copies and one (1) electronic version in .pdf of their professional qualification statements, no later than **5:00 p.m. CHST, FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024.** Statements of qualification must be presented by a combination of both brochures and the use of current U.S. Government Standard Form 330.

The CPA reserves the right to reject any or all statements of professional qualification for any reason, if in its sole opinion to do so would be in its best interest.

/s/ LEO B. TUDELA
Executive Director

Date: February 7, 2024

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
CNMI GOVERNMENT

INVITATION TO BID
ITB NO.: DPW24-ITB No.: 42400036

SUBMISSION DATE: March 08, 2024 TIME: 10:00 A.M.

"Rehabilitation of Roll Off Container Bay Dumpster"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED AT THE TECHNICAL SERVICES DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS, LOCATED ON SECOND FLOOR, OLEAI JOETEN COMMERCIAL CENTER, SAN JOSE, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

The project package will be available on or after February 09, 2024 at Technical Services Division, Department of Public Works, located on Second Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, San Jose, Saipan. A non-refundable payment of **One Hundred Dollars ($100.00)** is required for each set. Payment must be made to the CNMI Teasurer and a receipt of pay-ment must be presented when obtaining the Scope of Work at the DPW Technical Services Division.

There will be a **Pre-bid Conference** for this project on February 27, 2024, 9:00 a.m. local time at the **Solid Waste Management Division, Lower Base,** Saipan. The Prospective bidders are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the site. All question regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than 4:30 p.m. local time on March 01, 2024 to **Mr. Anthony A. Camacho, Director of Technical Services Division,** 2nd Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, Saipan or fax to (670) 234-3547. Response to questions shall be shared with prospective bidders.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ RAY N. YUMUL
SECRETARY, DPW

/S/ BRIEN SERS NICHOLAS JR.
Acting Director, Division of Procurement Services

Business

Dive into meaty delight with Deli Heroes

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

ADVERTISING Feature

Subway Restaurants in Gualo Rai and Chalan Piao are now serving hero-sized treats for sandwich enthusiasts called the Deli Heroes. These four new mouthwatering creations redefine the sandwich experience and give meat and cheese aficionados alike a double dose of their guilty pleasure.

With 33% more meat than a typical build-your-own sandwich, the #15 Titan Turkey and #99 Grand Slam Ham are the heavyweight contenders for those who like their sandwiches packed with lots of lip-smacking protein.

As if that weren't enough, there's The Beast #33, tips the scales with a half-pound of a meat lover's dream—pepperoni, salami, turkey, ham, and roast beef—all in one colossal creation.

Seeking an explosion of flavors? That shouldn't be a problem. The #17 Garlic Roast Beef will cover that. With 33% more meat, twice the cheese of a build-your-own sandwich, and drizzled with Roasted Garlic Aioli, it's a feast that satisfies all the senses.

So instead of incurring the added cost for an extra helping of meat in your sandwich, you can just order any of the four Subway Deli Heroes, which are reasonably priced starting at $6.99.

Your local Subway also now offers the convenience of online ordering. So, if you're stuck in the Beach Road traffic, and only have time for a run-and-go lunch, just order online for pickup at https://subwaypacific.com/orderonline-pickup. No more waiting in line—indulge in your Deli Hero in just a few clicks.

As the cherry on top (or should we say, a cookie on the side), Subway is sweetening the deal. For a limited time, every $20 online order will come with a code for two free cookies. Simply enter the code at the prompt, and you'll have the perfect dessert to complement your hero-sized feast.

So, if you're craving a sandwich adventure that transcends the ordinary, the Deli Heroes at Subway are calling your name. Dive into the meaty marvels and embrace the convenience of online ordering—because sometimes, heroes do come in the form of a sandwich.

CHRYSTAL MARINO
Sandwich artist Yalina Bai creates sandwiches for a party platter at Subway Chalan Piao last Wednesday.

CHRYSTAL MARINO
Subway's Yalina Bai serves a customer at Subway Chalan Piao last Wednesday.

CHRYSTAL MARINO
The Chalan Piao Subway branch now serves the New Deli Heroes.

House blocks effort from NY Republicans to boost 'SALT' tax deduction

WASHINGTON (AP)—A longshot bid to temporarily double a $10,000 cap on state and local tax deductions for most married couples went down to defeat Wednesday in the House.

The limit was put in place as part of the sweeping tax cuts that a Republican-led Congress passed during then-President Donald Trump's administration. The so-called SALT cap has led to bigger tax bills for many residents of New York, New Jersey, California and other high-cost, high-tax states, and is an important campaign issue in those states.

A procedural vote to bring up the legislation was rejected by a vote of 195-225.

While unsuccessful, the vote gave Republicans in swing congressional districts the chance to show they're fighting to get tax relief for constituents now unable to fully deduct the amount of local and state taxes they pay. It's a particularly important issue for the Republican members of the New York delegation, some serving in districts that President Joe Biden won in 2020.

Underscoring the political dynamics at play, the vote came just one day after Democrats took back one House seat in New York, with Tom Suozzi winning the seat left vacant last year when Republican Rep. George Santos was expelled from office.

"I think it shows the people back home that the Republicans they sent here in Biden districts fought hard to get it onto the floor," said Rep. Anthony D'Esposito, who represents one of those districts.

Democrats used the debate Wednesday to remind the bill's supporters which party was responsible for imposing the $10,000 cap. Republicans limited the deduction to help pay for other tax cuts in the 2017 package. They also cast the vote as an "election ploy to help New York Republicans win the next election."

"They created this problem that they now want to put a band-aid on," Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez, D-N.M., said of House Republicans.

Under current law, the $10,000 cap applies to single filers and married couples filing jointly. The bill from Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., would double the cap for married couples who file taxes jointly and make up to $500,000. The change would only apply to the 2023 tax year. Lawler said the current cap penalizes married couples.

Nearly half of taxpayers in his district claimed the state and local tax deduction before the law was changed during the Trump administration. Now, it's about one in five, he said. Nationally, the percentage of taxpayers claiming the deduction has dropped from about 31% to 9%, he said.

"This stark decrease has disproportionately impacted high-cost states like New York where the cost of living far exceeds the national average," Lawler said.

After the vote, Lawler said New York Republicans fought for their districts and the state, and "New York Democrats helped tanked the bill." He said Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries urged colleagues to vote against the procedural rule.

"I think it's unfortunate New York Democrats tanked the rule and did not allow for an up-or-down vote on the bill," Lawler said.

The issue transcends political parties. Eighteen Republicans hailing from states where the cap on the deductions is not an issue for the vast majority of taxpayers also voted against the rule allowing for consideration of the measure. Every Democrat also voted against moving forward.

Analysts say that eliminating the cap, or even just doubling it for married couples filing jointly, would deprive the federal treasury of revenues and increase federal deficits. They also said the adjustment would primarily benefit higher-income households.

Japan slips to world's 4th-largest economy, behind the US, China, and now Germany

TOKYO (AP)—Japan has slipped to the world's fourth-largest economy as government data released Thursday showed it fell behind the size of Germany's in 2023.

The numbers highlight how the Japanese economy has gradually lost its competitiveness and productivity while the population shrinks as Japanese people age and have fewer children, analysts say.

Japan fell from the second-ranked economy behind the U.S. to the third-largest in 2010 as China's economy grew. The International Monetary Fund had forecast Japan's fall to fourth.

The comparisons among nations' economies look at nominal GDP, which doesn't reflect some different national conditions, and is in dollar terms. Japan's nominal GDP totaled $4.2 trillion last year, or about 591 trillion yen. Germany's, announced last month, was $4.4 trillion, or $4.5 trillion, depending on the currency conversion.

For the latest October-December quarter, the Japanese economy shrank at an annual rate of 0.4%, and minus 0.1% from the previous quarter, according to Cabinet Office data on real GDP. For the year, real GDP grew 1.9% from the previous year.

Real gross domestic product is a measure of the value of a nation's products and services. The annual rate measures what would have happened if the quarterly rate lasted a year.

Both Japan and Germany built their economies through strong small and medium-size businesses with solid productivity. In contrast to Japan, Germany has shown a solid economic foundation on the back of a strong euro and inflation. The weak yen also works as a minus for Japan.

The latest data reflect the realities of a weakening Japan and will likely result in Japan's commanding a lesser presence in the world, said Tetsuji Okazaki, professor of economics at the University of Tokyo.

"Several years ago, Japan boasted a powerful auto sector, for instance. But with the advent of electric vehicles, even that advantage is shaken," he said.

The gap between developed countries and emerging nations is shrinking, with India certain to overtake Japan in nominal GDP in a few years, Okazaki said.

To solve the country's labor shortage problem, immigration is one option. But Japan has been relatively unaccepting of foreign labor, except as temporary guests, prompting criticism about the lack of diversity and discrimination.

Nation

Migrant crossings at US-Mexico border are down

» What's behind the drop?

AP

Migrants wait to be processed by the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol after they crossed the Rio Grande and entered the U.S. from Mexico, Oct. 19, 2023, in Eagle Pass, Texas.

McALLEN, Texas (AP)—A recent decline in arrests for illegal crossings on the U.S. border with Mexico may prove only temporary. The drop in January reflects how the numbers ebb and flow, and the reason usually goes beyond any single factor.

After a record-breaking number of encounters at the southern border in December, crossings dropped by half last month, authorities reported Tuesday. The largest decrease was in the Del Rio sector that includes Eagle Pass, Texas, the main focus of Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's recent border enforcement efforts. Mexico also increased enforcement efforts during that time after talks with U.S. President Joe Biden's administration.

A look at the numbers and what's behind them:

WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SAY?

Overall, arrests by U.S. Border Patrol dropped in January by 50% from 249,735 in December, the highest monthly tally on record.

Tucson, Arizona, was again the busiest sector for illegal crossings with 50,565 arrests, down 37% from December, followed by San Diego. Arrests in the Border Patrol's Del Rio sector plummeted 76% from December to 16,712, the lowest since December 2021. Arrests in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, dropped 60% to 7,340, the lowest since July 2020.

A significant decrease was noted among Venezuelans whose arrests dropped by 91% to 4,422 from 46,920. But those numbers could change soon. Panama reported that 36,001 migrants traversed the dangerous Darien Gap in January, up 46% from December. The vast majority who cross the Panamanian jungle are Venezuelans headed to the United States, with considerable numbers from Haiti, China, Ecuador and Colombia.

WHAT IS MEXICO DOING?

Mexico has been forcing migrants from freight trains that they sometimes use to cross the country to get closer to the U.S. border. Immigration officers in Mexico also have been busing migrants to that country's southern border and flying some back to their countries.

That enforcement effort began after a visit from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Mexico City on Dec. 28.

Mexican border states such as Coahuila partnered with Mexico's federal government. By January, members of Mexico's military and national guard were patrolling the banks of the Rio Grande. Officers filled buses with migrants and drove them away from Piedras Negras, which is on the Mexican side of the river across from Eagle Pass.

WHAT IS TEXAS DOING?

Over in Eagle Pass, the Texas National Guard took over a city-owned park along the river. Texas has denied U.S. agents access to Shelby Park since Jan. 10. It also installed additional razor wire and anti-climbing fencing in the area.

Border Patrol agents had previously used the park for monitoring and patrols, as well as to process migrants who made it across the river to U.S. soil. Migrants who are seeking asylum are released to await immigration court proceedings that can take years.

"What you have is this magnet," Mike Banks, Texas' border czar, said. "You're basically saying, `Cross the river right here. Get across and we'll process immediately and release you.' So again, that's a pull factor. So we've taken that pull factor away."

WHAT ELSE IMPACTS THE NUMBERS?

The number of people trying to make the journey often increases when the weather is warmer in the U.S. and decreases during the colder months. Since 2021, crossings on the southern border increase by an average of 40% from January to March, according to federal data from the last three years.

Another factor last year was the end of COVID-19 restrictions in May. The use of a public health policy known as Title 42 allowed the Trump and Biden administrations to turn asylum-seekers back to Mexico, even if they were not from that country.

Crossings fell dramatically for a month after Title 42 ended and the Biden administration enforced new rules.

Speaker Johnson says House won't be 'rushed' to approve aid for Ukraine as $95B package stalls

WASHINGTON (AP)—Republican Speaker Mike Johnson said Wednesday the U.S. House will not feel "rushed" to pass the $95.3 billion foreign aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other allies, signaling a further stall over sending military hardware and munitions Kyiv badly needs to fight Russia.

Johnson made the remarks behind closed doors at a morning meeting of House Republicans, who are largely aligned with Donald Trump, the party's presidential front-runner, in opposing the Senate-passed foreign assistance for Ukraine's fight against Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion.

The speaker let colleagues know that the House will instead "work its will," in considering the package, said a person familiar with the private remarks and granted anonymity to discuss them.

"The Republican-led House will not be jammed or forced into passing a foreign aid bill," Johnson said at a press conference afterward.

Johnson, who rejected a border security compromise that was eventually stripped from the final product, said the Senate's package "does nothing" to secure the U.S.-Mexico border, which has been the GOP's priority.

He said he had requested a meeting with President Joe Biden months ago on these issues, and was still waiting for the opportunity to talk one-on-one.

The White House suggested that Johnson was in no position for productive talks after Republicans demanded that border security be attached to the national security aid and then he rejected the bipartisan package approved by the Senate.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said that Johnson basically needs to negotiate with himself on what to do, rather than the White House.

"What is there to negotiate?" she said at Wednesday's news briefing. "What is the one-on-one negotiation about when he's been presented with exactly what he asked for? So he's negotiating with himself."

The slow-walk of U.S. aid to an ally during the largest ground war in Europe since World War II shows how far Republicans have retreated from overseas leadership in line with Trump.

While Johnson has said he personally supports aid for Ukraine, he leads a far-right majority that is more closely aligned with Trump's isolationist ideology and, increasingly, a hands-off approach to Putin's aggression.

It's increasingly clear the new speaker has no clear strategy for what happens next as the aid package that was approved by an overwhelming majority of senators this week falls into serious jeopardy.

Biden has warned that refusal to take up the bill would be "playing into Putin's hands."

Separately, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin made his own push for Ukraine aid in a virtual session with the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, some 50 countries that coordinate military support for Ukraine.

Austin conducted the online meeting from his home, where he is recuperating from complications following prostate cancer surgery.

In Congress, meanwhile, one last ditch effort coming from a number of lawmakers, Democrats and some Republicans, would be to employ an unusual procedure that would force the House to take up the bill for a vote over the objections of the GOP speaker and his leadership.

The so-called discharge petition is a cumbersome, long-shot approach, but it's one way to leverage the political power of the more centrist Republican lawmakers in a coalition with Democrats to ensure aid to Ukraine and the allies. But it seems unlikely.

Trump stands by remarks about not defending NATO members

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP)—Former President Donald Trump again said Wednesday that if he returns to the White House, he would not defend NATO members that don't meet defense spending targets, days after he set off alarms in Europe by suggesting he would tell Russia to attack NATO allies he considered delinquent.

Speaking at a campaign rally in South Carolina, he retold the story of his alleged conversation with the head of a NATO member country that had not met its obligations. This time, though, he left out the line that drew the most outrage—encouraging Russia "to do whatever the hell they want."

"Look, if they're not going to pay, we're not going to protect. OK?" he said Wednesday.

Trump hewed closer than usual to his prepared remarks after a freewheeling event days earlier in which he also drew backlash for mocking his Republican rival Nikki Haley's husband for being missing from the campaign trail. He also revised his comments about Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom he has often praised as tough and previously suggested treated him like the "apple of his eye."

Instead, Trump cited an interview Putin gave Wednesday to Russian state television in which he said he would prefer Biden as president.

"Putin is not a fan of mine," Trump said.

Haley, Trump's former U.N. ambassador and his last major rival in the GOP presidential race, has been condemning Trump's remarks for days about her husband Michael Haley, who is deployed in Africa with the National Guard.

Trump on Wednesday insulted Nikki Haley and highlighted his wide lead in polls over her, but he focused more of his attention on President Joe Biden, whom he's expected to face in the 2024 general election.

Biden has also excoriated Trump for his remarks about NATO, calling them "dangerous," "un-American," and "shocking." Biden has also pushed for a foreign aid package to assist Ukraine as it fights Russia's invasion.

Trump has opposed the aid and said Wednesday that the U.S. should instead provide a loan to Ukraine.

"Why should you just hand it over to them?" he said.

A spokesperson for Biden's reelection campaign said Wednesday, "Donald Trump just gave Vladimir Putin the best possible Valentine's Day present: his pinky-promise to give Putin the green light to mow down our allies in Europe if he's elected president."

Asia

Myanmar will start drafting 5,000 people a month into military soon

BANGKOK (AP)—Myanmar's military government on Wednesday said it will draft 60,000 young men and women yearly for military service under its newly activated conscription law, with call-ups beginning after the April festival marking the country's traditional New Year.

The conscription measure was activated on Saturday by order of the chairman of the ruling military council, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing.

His surprise announcement appeared to confirm that the military has been stretched thin by increasing pressure from armed pro-democracy resistance forces that emerged after the army seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

There are no reliable figures for the size of Myanmar's military. The CIA World Factbook estimated that last year it had around 150,000-400,000 personnel. The Washington-based U.S. Institute of Peace has suggested that 21,000 service personnel have been lost through casualties, desertions and defections since the military takeover, leaving an effective force of about 150,000.

Under the law, men aged 18 to 35 and women 18 to 27 can be drafted into the armed forces for two years. A higher age limit of 45 for men and 35 for women applies in certain professional categories such as medical doctors and engineers, and their term of service is three years.

The army's information office said in a statement sent to journalists that 5,000 people each month will be called up and given training. Women will be called up starting with the fifth batch, it said.

Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun, spokesperson for the military government, said in a statement published in the state-run Myanma Alinn newspaper that about 14 million people — 6.3 million men and 7.7 million women — of the country's population of 56 million are eligible for military service.

He told the BBC's Burmese language service on Tuesday that the initial batch of 5,000 conscripts would be called up soon after the traditional Thingyan New Year celebration in mid-April.

The conscription law's activation has created fear, anxiety and defiance among young people and their parents, according to postings on social media and private conversations. Some people are considering are leaving the country, fleeing into border areas controlled by ethnic minorities or joining resistance groups.

Evading conscription is punishable by three to five years in prison and a fine. Members of religious orders are exempt, while civil servants and students can be granted temporary deferments.

Kim watches missile tests, warns N. Korea will take aggressive stance in disputed seas

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a test of new surface-to-sea missiles and warned that the country would take a more aggressive military posture in disputed seas, the North's state media said Thursday.

The report by the Korean Central News Agency came a day after South Korea's military detected the North firing multiple cruise missiles into waters off its eastern port of Wonsan. The launches were the sixth such event this year and added to a provocative run in weapons demonstrations since 2022.

Some experts say Kim may seek to further dial up pressure in an election year in South Korea and the United States. There are growing concerns in South Korea about a direct military provocation, and a possible area of conflict could be the Koreas' poorly drawn western sea boundary, where several bloody skirmishes have occurred in past years.

Kim supervised the test launches of the new weapon, named Padasuri-6, and said the North would strengthen its deployment of surface-to-sea missiles to fend off any "adventurous" attempts by the South Korean navy. He accused South Korea of frequently violating what he decried as North Korean territorial waters with its maritime patrols and interdiction of third-party ships. He ordered his navy to strengthen its defense posture in waters near the South Korean border islands of Baekryeong and Yeonpyeong, where a North Korean artillery bombardment killed four people in 2010.

Two Chinese fishermen drown after chase with Taiwan's Coast Guard, which alleges trespassing

BANGKOK (AP)—Two Chinese fishermen have drowned while being chased by Taiwan's Coast Guard off the coast of Taiwan's Kinmen archipelago, the coast guard said Wednesday while accusing them of trespassing.

The deaths are unusual despite the level of Chinese activity in the waters near Kinmen, which is closer to China than it is to Taiwan's main island. China claims all of Taiwan as part of its territory.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office strongly condemned the deaths and called for an investigation, saying "such a malicious event during the Spring Festival seriously hurts the feelings of compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait." Both China and Taiwan are celebrating the Lunar New Year holiday.

The statement accused the ruling Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan of using "all sorts of excuses to forcefully inspect Chinese fishing vessels, and using violent and dangerous methods towards Chinese fishermen."

The unnamed Chinese vessel had been sailing about one nautical mile off the coast of an islet of Kinmen island, Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration said in a statement. The Chinese vessel attempted to flee but capsized.

Four fishermen fell into the water and two survived and are in "good shape," while resuscitation efforts on the other two failed, the vice captain of the coast guard in Kinmen, Chen Jien-wen, told a local TV channel.

The Coast Guard said the case has been reported to the Kinmen prosecutor's office, and the fishermen's families were being contacted via official channels.

World

Gaza cease-fire and hostage release talks appear to stall

AP

Palestinians fleeing the Israeli offensive on Khan Younis arrive at Rafah, Gaza Strip. Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2024.

JERUSALEM (AP)—International efforts to broker a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas suffered a setback on Wednesday as Israel reportedly recalled its negotiating team and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Hamas of hobbling the high-stakes negotiations by sticking to "delusional" demands.

» As Netanyahu and Hamas trade blame

Netanyahu's remarks came hours after local media reported that the Israeli leader had ordered an Israeli delegation not to continue talks in Cairo, raising concerns over the fate of the negotiations and sparking criticism from the families of the roughly 130 remaining captives, about a fourth of whom are said to be dead.

The relatives of the hostages said Netanyahu's decision amounted to a "death sentence" for their loved ones.

The mediation efforts, steered by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, have been working to bring the warring sides toward an agreement that might secure a truce in the monthslong war, which has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children, according to local health officials. The fighting has destroyed vast parts of Gaza, displaced most of the territory's population and sparked a humanitarian catastrophe.

"In Cairo, Israel did not receive any new proposal from Hamas on the release of our captives," Netanyahu said in a statement. "A change in Hamas' positions will allow progress in the negotiations."

Hamas meanwhile said Netanyahu was to blame. Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan told The Associated Press that Israel had put forward a proposal that strayed from agreements reached during earlier cease-fire talks.

On Tuesday, CIA chief William Burns and David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, attended the talks in the Egyptian capital, but there were no signs of a breakthrough. The talks continued Wednesday at a lower level, even as deadly violence persisted both in the Gaza Strip and along Israel's border with Lebanon, where fighting has simmered since the war broke out.

Israeli media reported Wednesday that Netanyahu told his delegation not to return to the talks unless Hamas softens its demands.

The sides have been far apart on their terms for a deal. Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until "total victory" over Hamas and the return of all the remaining hostages.

Ukrainian military says it sank a Russian landing ship in Black Sea

KYIV, Ukraine (AP)—Ukraine's military said Wednesday it used high-tech naval drones to sink a Russian landing ship in the Black Sea, a report that has not been confirmed by Russian authorities.

The Caesar Kunikov amphibious ship sank 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) off Alupka, a city on the southern edge of the Crimean Peninsula that Moscow annexed in 2014, Ukraine's General Staff said. It said the ship can carry 87 crew members. The ship was also transporting ammunition, a Ukrainian official said.

Sinking the vessel would be another embarrassing blow for the Russian Black Sea fleet and a significant success for Ukraine 10 days before the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on the claim during a conference call with reporters Wednesday. He said questions should be addressed to the Russian military.

Several Russian military bloggers confirmed the attack on the ship but stopped short of confirming that it had been sunk.

Ukraine has moved onto the defensive in the war, hindered by low ammunition supplies and a shortage of personnel, but has kept up its strikes behind the largely static 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line.

It is the second time in two weeks that Ukrainian forces have said they sank a Russian vessel in the Black Sea. Last week, they published a video that they said showed naval drones assaulting the Russian missile-armed corvette Ivanovets.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence, known by its Ukrainian acronym GUR, said its special operations unit "Group 13" sank the Caesar Kunikov using advanced Magura V5 sea drones on Wednesday. Explosions damaged the vessel on its left side, it said, though a heavily edited video it released was unclear. The same unit also struck on Feb. 1, according to officials.

Off the Wall

Stingray with no male mate is pregnant in her aquarium

AQUARIUM AND SHARK LAB BY TEAM ECCO VIA AP

Kinsley Boyette, assistant director of the Aquarium and Shark Lab by Team ECCO, poses in this undated photo next to Charlotte, a round stingray, in Hendersonville, N.C. The aquarium said Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2024, that Charlotte is pregnant, even though she's lived at the aquarium for years without a male companion of her species.

By BEN FINLEY
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Charlotte, a rust-colored stingray the size of a serving platter, has spent much of her life gliding around the confines of a storefront aquarium in North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains.

She's 2,300 miles (3,700 kilometers) from her natural habitat under the waves off southern California. And she hasn't shared a tank of water with a male of her species in at least eight years.

And yet nature has found a way, the aquarium's owner said: The stingray is pregnant with as many as four pups and could give birth in the next two weeks.

"Here's our girl saying, 'Hey, Happy Valentine's Day! Let's have some pups!'" said Brenda Ramer, executive director of the Aquarium and Shark Lab on Main Street in downtown Hendersonville.

An expert on the stingrays said it would have been impossible for Charlotte to have mated with one of the five small sharks that share her tank, despite news reports suggesting that was the case after Ramer joked about a possible interspecies hookup.

The small aquarium is run by Ramer's educational nonprofit, Team ECCO, which encourages local schoolchildren and others to take an interest in science.

Its biggest lesson now is on the process of parthenogenesis: a type of asexual reproduction in which offspring develop from unfertilized eggs, meaning there is no genetic contribution by a male.

The mostly rare phenomenon can occur in some insects, fish, amphibians, birds and reptiles, but not mammals. Documented examples have included California condors, Komodo dragons and yellow-bellied water snakes.

Kady Lyons, a research scientist at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta who is not involved with the North Carolina aquarium, said Charlotte's pregnancy is the only documented example she's aware of for this species, round stingrays.

But Lyons isn't at all shocked. Other kinds of sharks, skates and rays—a trio of animals often grouped together—have had these kinds of pregnancies in human care.

"I'm not surprised, because nature finds a way of having this happen," she said.

To be clear, Lyons said, these animals are not cloning themselves. Instead, a female's egg fuses with another cell, triggers cell division and leads to the creation of an embryo.

The cell that fuses with the egg is known as a polar body. They are produced when a female is creating an egg but usually aren't used.

"We don't know why it happens," Lyons said. "Just that it's kind of this really neat phenomenon that they seem to be able to do."

Ramer said she and others at the nonprofit at first thought that Charlotte had a tumor when they noticed a lump on her back that was "blowing up like a biscuit." But an ultrasound revealed her pregnancy.

"We were all like, 'Shut the back door. There's no way," Ramer said. "We thought we were overfeeding her. But we were overfeeding her because she has more mouths to feed."

Charlotte currently lives in a tank that's about 2,200 gallons (8,300 liters), or nearly the size of a construction dumpster. Ramer said they're hoping to get a tank nearly twice that size to accommodate Charlotte's offspring. They also want to put live cameras up for people to see them.

"It is very rare to happen," Ramer said. "But it's happening in the middle of the Blue Ridge Mountains in rural North Carolina, hundreds of miles from the ocean."

As for the suggestion that Charlotte could have been impregnated by a shark, Lyons said that's impossible. Besides being different sizes, the animals wouldn't match up anatomically. Neither would their DNA.

"We should set the record straight that there aren't some shark-ray shenanigans happening here," said Lyons, whose graduate work focused on the species.

Round stingrays like Charlotte are abundant on the Pacific coasts of southern California and Mexico, often resting on the ocean's sandy bottom near the shoreline.

In the wild they are typically the size of a small dinner plate, and their name comes from their circular shape. They come in all shades of brown. They eat small worms, crabs and mollusks, and they are preyed upon by certain types of sharks, seals and giant sea bass.

Science & Technology

Saturn's moon may have vast underground ocean

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP)—Astronomers have found the best evidence yet of a vast, young ocean beneath the icy exterior of Saturn's Death Star lookalike mini moon.

The French-led team analyzed changes in Mimas' orbit and rotation and reported Wednesday that a hidden ocean 12 to 18 miles (20 to 30 kilometers) beneath the frozen crust was more likely than an elongated rocky core. The scientists based their findings on observations by NASA's Cassini spacecraft, which observed Saturn and its more than 140 moons for more than a decade before diving through the ringed planet's atmosphere in 2017 and burning up.

Barely 250 miles (400 kilometers) in diameter, the heavily cratered moon lacks the fractures and geysers—typical signs of subsurface activity—of Saturn's Enceladus and Jupiter's Europa.

"Mimas was probably the most unlikely place to look for a global ocean—and liquid water more generally," co-author Valery Lainey of the Paris Observatory said in an email. "So that looks like a potential habitable world. But nobody knows how much time is needed for life to arise."

Results were published in the journal Nature.

The ocean is believed to fill half of Mimas' volume, according to Lainey. Yet it represents only 1.2% to 1.4% of Earth's oceans given the moon's petite size. Despite being so small, Mimas boasts the second largest impact crater of any moon in the solar system—the reason it's compared to the fictional Death Star space station in "Star Wars."

Countdown begins for April's total solar eclipse.

By MARCIA DUNN
AP AEROSPACE WRITER

The sun is about to pull another disappearing act across North America, turning day into night during a total solar eclipse.

The peak spectacle on April 8 will last up to 4 minutes, 28 seconds in the path of total darkness—twice as long as the total solar eclipse that dimmed U.S. skies in 2017.

This eclipse will take a different and more populated route, entering over Mexico's Pacific coast, dashing up through Texas and Oklahoma, and crisscrossing the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic and New England, before exiting over eastern Canada into the Atlantic.

An estimated 44 million people live inside the 115-mile-wide (185-kilometer-wide) path of totality stretching from Mazatlán, Mexico to Newfoundland; about 32 million of them are in the U.S., guaranteeing jammed roads for the must-see celestial sensation.

The eclipse will allow many to share in the "wonder of the universe without going very far," said NASA's eclipse program manager Kelly Korreck.

In Loving Memory
†Marino Hiroichi
Born to life: June 10, 1949 – Called to eternal life: February 09, 2024
In his new life he now joins his:
Parents: †Dorothea Ochob Wachi & † Juan Uheremasch Hiroichi
Siblings: †Faustino Kono, †Tagako Tatum, †Guadalupe Borja, †Atanacio Borja †Jesus Borja, †Remedio Dondoyano, †Joaquina Borja, †Benita Cepeda, †Martina Basilius, †Magdalena Tudela, †Marcella Soltowski
His memories will forever live in the hearts of his:
Wife: Emiliana "Emi" M. Hiroichi
Children: Lisamarie "Dilubch" Hiroichi /Eric Lizama: Crystal "Dilyolt"/ Anthony Suzuki, Aleeyah "Kedei" (Aiden), John Kevin, Travis Jr. & Tralisia Dewonee
McQueen Hiroichi/Peggy Malakai: Keoki Nathanial/Tatum, Keone McQuire/Casidy, Emmeli Marcella
Marino Hiroichi Jr./Maggie Aldan: Marino Hiroichi III, Marquix, Turbulence "Merau," PROA "Yars," Caliber "Masang," JuniorBoy, Jethro Gibbs "Yoyo," Tommie Shelby "Ilong"
Mannix Hiroichi/Rita Camacho: Mannix Jr. Calisto, Mukiebetz, Marino Hiroichi IV
Marieliz "Ochob" Hiroichi/Erlinse Santos
Rear Children: Carmen Masang/Berry Brunson: Jonathan & Tyler (Derik)
Ann Marie Masang/Joe Whedbee: Garette, Brandon
Sister: Maria Theresita H. Aldan
Funeral services will be held on Monday, February 19th, 2024 His remains will be escorted from CHCC Morgue at 8:15 am to Kristo Rai Parish. Responso Service will take place upon arrival of the remains.
Mass of Christian burial will be celebrated at 11:00am followed by Interment Service at Sanctuario PAX Memorial Gardens where he will be laid to a peaceful rest.
Please join us in prayers
Emiliana, Lisamarie, McQueen, Marino Jr. Mannix, Marieliz & family

Life & Style

La Scala concert features violins inmates made from migrant boats

MILAN (AP)—The violins, violas and cellos played by the Orchestra of the Sea in its debut performance at Milan's famed Teatro alla Scala carry with them tales of desperation and redemption.

The wood that was bent, chiseled and gouged to form the instruments was recovered from dilapidated smugglers' boats that brought migrants to Italy's shores; the luthiers who created them are inmates in Italy's largest prison.

The project, dubbed Metamorphosis, focuses on transforming what otherwise might be discarded into something of value to society: rotten wood into fine instruments, inmates into craftsmen, all under the principle of rehabilitation.

Two inmates were granted leave to see the Orchestra of the Sea's debut concert Monday featuring 14 prison-made stringed instruments playing a program that included works by Bach and Vivaldi. They sat in the royal box alongside Milan Mayor Giuseppe Sala.

"I feel like Cinderella," said Claudio Lamponi, as a friend approached in the lobby before the show with a bow-tie to complement his new suit. "This morning I woke up in an ugly, dark place. Now I am here."

Far from the stately La Scala opera house, the Opera prison on Milan's southern edge has over 1,400 inmates, including 101 mafiosi held under a strict regime of near-total isolation.

Other inmates, like Nikolae, who joined Lamponi at La Scala, are permitted more latitude. Since joining the prison's instrument workshop in 2020, Nikolae—who declined to give his full name and prefers to skim over the charges that landed him in prison a decade ago—has become Opera's master craftsman, graduating from crude instruments made out of plywood to harmonious violins worthy of La Scala's stage.

ANTONIO CALANNI

Members of the 'Sea Orchestra' play with cellos made from the wood of wrecked immigrants' boats in Milan, Italy, Saturday, Feb. 10, 2024.

"That's how I began to speak with the wood," Nikolae said recently in the prison workshop, which is filled with the smell of wood chips amid the rows of chisels and the faint hum of a jigsaw. "I started with very poor materials, and they saw I had good dexterity."

Working on the instruments four to five hours a day gives him a sense of tranquility, he said, to reflect on "the mistakes I made" and skills that allow him to consider a future. "I am gaining self-esteem," he said, "which is no small thing."

One "graduate" of the prison workshops has completed his sentence and is working as a master luthier at another prison, in Rome.

"I hope one day, I can be recuperated, like this violin," Nikolae said.

For another prisoner, who preferred to remain anonymous, making the instruments is a form of therapy, physical and psychological. He lived through two wars in his home country, which he also asked not to be identified because he served time as a political prisoner there and says he was beaten to the point of needing a crutch to walk.

He falls into a trance as he gently chisels the back of a violin's front piece, measuring the thickness with an instrument to achieve perfect pitch. Dig too much, and it's back to the drawing board. His own rocky journey to a new country has given him an understanding of the desperation that drove migrants onto unseaworthy boats.

"As I am working on these pieces, I think of the refugees that this wood transported, the women and children," he said. "I think only of that as I work, what this piece of wood has lived."

Lamponi and fellow inmate Andrea Volonghi have found new purpose in their life sentences, pulling apart the smugglers' boats deposited in a yard among the prison blocks. Originally, the boats were being transformed into crucifixes and nativity scenes, but the inmates who were already trained luthiers thought: why not instruments?

So they now look for the prime pieces for the instrument workshop, removing rusted nails in the process. They send the more damaged wood to another prison in Rome, where prisoners make crucifixes for rosaries. In a full-circle moment, the rosaries are assembled by migrants at a Vatican workshop.

The boats arrive at Opera as they were seized, still containing remnants of the migrants' lives, and with them a reminder of the 22,870 migrants that the U.N. says have died or gone missing on the perilous central Mediterranean crossing since 2014.

A shoulder bag with a disposable diaper, baby bottle and infant shoes sits on one prow alongside tins of anchovies and tuna from Tunisia and many plastic sandals.

"We don't know what happened to them, but we hope they survived," Volonghi said, considering a tiny pink sneaker with a well-known Western logo.

Each instrument takes 400 hours to create, from disassembling the boats to the finished product. While a classic violin made in the famed workshops of Cremona, an hour's drive from Milan, will use fir and maple, the instruments of the sea are assembled from a softer African fir, the sun- and sea-drenched hues of blue, orange and red left as a reminder of the journey. The veneer of paint influences the instruments' timbre.

"These instruments, which have crossed the sea, have a sweetness that you could not imagine," said cellist Mario Brunello, a member of the Orchestra of the Sea. "They don't have a story to tell. They have hope, a future."

The House of the Spirit and Arts Foundation that first brought workshops for making stringed instruments to four Italian prisons a decade ago hopes the concert at La Scala will be the beginning of a movement to bring Orchestra of the Sea performances first to the southern European countries bearing the brunt of migration, then to the northern capitals that hold the most sway in migrant policy.

"The beauty is that music overcomes all divisions, all ideologies, goes to the heart and soul of people, and one hopes that it makes people think," said foundation president Arnoldo Mosca Mondadori. "Politicians need to think of this drama."

Efforts to connect are met by silence

DEAR ABBY: I am engaged to an amazing guy. We have been together a little more than two years. During our first year, his family was great to me. They acted as if they liked me. However, things have changed. When my fiance and I are around them, they just wave and have little to say to me, if they say anything at all. They never call or text me; I'm always the one to do it first. Several times when I have texted, they haven't replied.

My fiance is very supportive. He tells me things will get better and tries to make me feel better about it, but I'm starting to get the impression they don't like me. Also, I don't feel I have anything in common with his mother and sister, which makes me feel even more awkward. I have tried to be friendly and to nurture a relationship with them, but I'm getting no effort in return. If you have any advice, please share.

UNLIKED IN KENTUCKY

DEAR UNLIKED: If you and your fiance have a good relationship, stop obsessing about his family. They may have made a fuss over you in the beginning because you were "new." Now a year has passed, and the novelty has worn off. I'm sorry your relationship with his family hasn't turned out to be what you envisioned it would be, but life can be like that. So take this step by step.

Nurture the relationships you have with friends, other couples and your own family. Relax, enjoy the life you are building with the man you love and take your cues for dealing with your future in-laws from your fiance. He knows them better than we do.

■■■

DEAR ABBY: My stepson, who had bipolar II, died by suicide a year and a half ago when we were away. We thought he was doing better, and his mom saw no reason to stay at our house while we were gone for a few days. The police told us he had made his decision and there was nothing we could have done. This was my husband's youngest, and he lived with us for 12 years. I grew quite fond of him, but I wasn't with him for the first 18 years of his life.

I am still grieving, but my husband is grieving more. He had a heart attack five months to the day after his son's suicide and then open-heart surgery. As my friend said after visiting him yesterday, that's depression to the nth degree. He doesn't see the need for therapy, and he hates extra medication. What can I do?

CONCERNED FOR HIM IN TEXAS

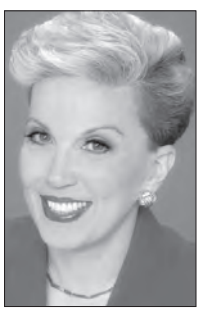
DEAR CONCERNED: Tell your husband you are still grieving the loss of your stepson and you know he is, too. Explain that you have a strong suspicion his recent heart attack may have been connected to the tragic loss of his son. His doctors should be put on notice if they don't already know the whole story.

If your husband is adamant about not getting grief counseling, tell him YOU are joining a grief support group, and you NEED him to accompany you because you love him and don't want to lose him, too.

■■■

What teens need to know about sex, drugs, AIDS and getting along with peers and parents is in "What Every Teen Should Know." Send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Teen Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

DEAR ABBY
BY ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

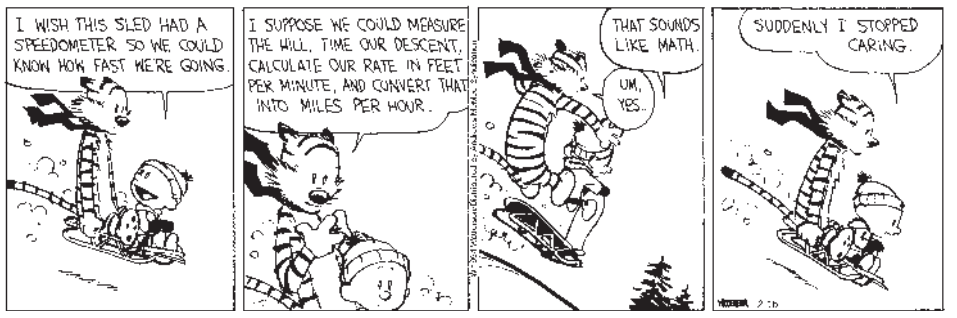


Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


I WISH THIS SLED HAD A SPEEDOMETER SO WE COULD KNOW HOW FAST WE'RE GOING.
I SUPPOSE WE COULD MEASURE THE HILL, TIME OUR DESCENT, CALCULATE OUR RATE IN FEET PER MINUTE, AND CONVERT THAT INTO MILES PER HOUR.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE MATH.
UM, YES.
SUDDENLY I STOPPED CARING.

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

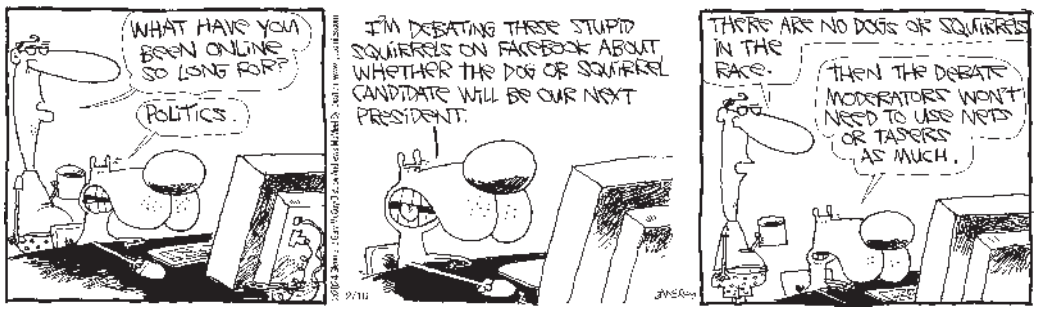
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

WHOA. THAT'S LIKE A DAGWOOD SANDWICH.
SHHH! WHAT ARE YOU, NUTS?
WHAT?
COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT. I MET BUMSTEAD AT A MIXER ONCE. NICE GUY BUT SUPER LITIGIOUS.
MAKES A HECK OF A SANDWICH, THOUGH.
YOU GUYS SHOULD FORM A NAP CLUB.
2-16

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy


WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN ONLINE SO LONG FOR?
POLITICS.
I'M DEBATING THESE STUPID SQUIRRELS ON FACEBOOK ABOUT WHETHER THE DOG OR SQUIRREL CANDIDATE WILL BE OUR NEXT PRESIDENT.
THERE ARE NO DOGS OR SQUIRRELS IN THE RACE.
THEN THE DEBATE MODERATORS WON'T NEED TO USE NETS OR TASERS AS MUCH.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

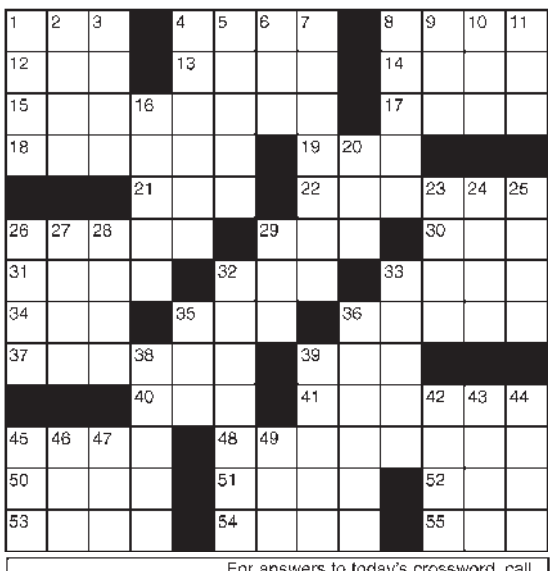
ACROSS
1 Sweetie
4 Invitation letters
8 Book after Joel
12 "Mad Men" network
13 Lamb alias
14 X-ray doses
15 Discover anew
17 Former mates
18 Shoe part
19 Actress Lupino
21 Stir-fry pan
22 Resurrection Sunday
26 Senate broadcaster
29 Whatever
30 Egg (Pref.)
31 Depend (on)
32 HIV-treating drug
33 Tech news website
34 Year in Spain
35 Dynamic
36 Dijon darling
37 Tony-winning "M. Butterfly" actor
39 Bikini top
40 Felon's flight
41 Down Under denizen
45 Tater
48 Right of passage
50 Russell of "Waitress"
51 Russian refusal
52 Green prefix
53 Harvard rival
54 Turner and Danson
55 Skillet

DOWN
1 Mata —
2 Warning sign
3 Mark Harmon TV series
4 Cosmetics giant
5 Streamlined
6 Coq au —
7 Extra on "Grey's Anatomy"
8 Locales
9 Upper limit
10 Lyric poem
11 Hot wok sound
16 "Dream on!"
20 24 hours
23 Vocal quality
24 Always
25 Indian flatbread
26 Grouch
27 Transmit
28 Turn the soil
29 Dye type
32 Enlarge
33 Deep gorge
35 "CSI" evidence
36 Vinegar bottles
38 "Golden" song
39 Founded (on)
42 Ooze
43 Bygone Peruvian
44 Thames town
45 Cloud setting
46 Soup legume
47 Internet address
49 Nay undoer

Solution time: 25 mins.

I	A	N	S		F	A	B	R		P	A	W
A	L	A	I		O	D	E	A		A	D	O
P	A	P	E	R	B	A	C	K		P	E	W
E	R	A	S	E	S			E	D	E	N	S
			I	O		C	O	D	E	R		
P	A	P	A		M	I	X		N	C	A	A
A	V	A			O	D	F			U	R	N
D	E	P	P		P	E	N		S	T	A	T
		E	A	T	E	R		M	A			
S	U	R	L	Y			K	A	R	A	T	E
E	S	C		P	A	P	E	R	T	H	I	N
L	D	U		L	L	A	N		H	A	N	D
D	A	P		D	E	N	I		E	I	A	S

Yesterday's answer 2-16



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call 1-900-226-5955! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: The Weeknd, 34; Elizabeth Olsen, 35; Ice-T, 66; Le-Var Burton, 67.

Happy Birthday: Focus on what you can accomplish. Avoid tough tasks until you have the skills, information or money to deal with such matters. Timing is everything, and knowing when to make a move will help you turn this eventful year into a platform to launch pursuits. Trust your instincts, follow your heart and be confident you can stop outside interference. Your numbers are 6, 13, 19, 28, 32, 37, 44.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19)*: Make health and well-being your priorities. Don't be tempted to follow someone who lacks common sense or hypes you up about something that can end in financial loss. Think for yourself, and take on only what you can afford or physically handle. Be good to yourself. ✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20)*: Watch your step. Don't feel pressured to speed up when you need time to contemplate what's best for you. Be resourceful and secretive about your intentions until you are ready to act. The element of surprise will give you the advantage. Make romance a priority. ✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20)*: Be resourceful, learn all you can and use what you discover to get ahead. You have plenty to gain if you put your head down and beeline it to the finish line. Don't let temptation take over. Play to win, and success will be yours. ✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22)*: Handle money matters with care. A partnership that encourages shared expenses will cause difficulties. Use your insight and ingenuity to come up with a plan that allows you the freedom to fend for yourself. ✪✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22)*: Put your time and cash into making a difference. Invest more time and money in yourself and what you want to pursue. Set a budget and map out a doable plan, and you'll discover peace of mind and the road to gratitude and happiness. ✪✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)*: You'll find it hard to decide what you want and need. Don't let temptation set in and lead you astray. Take a step back and look at the long-term effects of what you decide, and you'll find a path that encourages you to do what's right. ✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)*: Do your best to make your home a place of comfort and convenience. A move or investment that helps access a better lifestyle is apparent if you take the initiative to bring about change. Stop procrastinating. ✪✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21)*: Be careful when dealing with friends, relatives and colleagues. Listen carefully and keep your thoughts private until you feel comfortable sharing your comments. A sudden change or disapproval will catch you off guard if you are too accommodating. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)*: Handle money matters carefully for the best results. Don't put anyone in charge who can affect how you earn your living, handle your money or care for your personal needs. Fight for your rights and promote what works best for you. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)*: Take the initiative; reorganize your space to accommodate what you are trying to achieve. Setting the stage for success will make life easier for you and harder for those who try to get in your way. ✪✪✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*: Think and do for yourself. Refuse help from those trying to point you in a direction that's better for them than you. Take an interest in where your money goes. Investigate pursuits that help you grow personally and professionally. ✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20)*: Keep your secrets to yourself. Don't give anyone a chance to make you look bad or put you in harm's way. Look for opportunities, and don't hesitate to implement the changes that help you get ahead. A unique gesture will encourage romance. ✪✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are powerful, resourceful and a humanitarian. You are insightful and complex.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

					2	1	8	
		9	5					2
	8		6			4		
1		5	3		8			6
8	9						3	
	3	7		6				
		8	1					4
	5							
				7	6	3	9	

Difficulty: ★★★★ 2/16

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

8	4	7	3	5	9	2	6	1
9	6	5	2	7	1	4	8	3
2	3	1	8	4	6	9	5	7
7	1	4	5	8	2	6	3	9
6	8	3	7	9	4	1	2	5
5	2	9	1	6	3	7	4	8
1	9	2	4	3	5	8	7	6
3	7	6	9	2	8	5	1	4
4	5	8	6	1	7	3	9	2

Difficulty: ★★★ 2/15

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WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

RYAN O'NEAL (1941-2023) Solution: 5 letters

N	L	T	H	E	D	R	I	V	E	R	H	T	H	G
L	O	O	R	E	H	T	A	F	M	O	C	H	E	O
H	A	M	S	C	B	B	C	E	U	T	O	E	P	L
C	H	R	I	A	O	A	N	H	T	C	P	A	I	D
T	O	N	A	N	N	N	C	A	A	A	E	T	S	E
A	U	S	E	M	A	G	E	H	T	R	N	E	O	N
M	S	S	R	O	I	T	E	R	E	E	L	R	D	A
S	E	H	J	E	C	E	I	L	N	L	R	E	E	M
S	W	A	G	Y	N	C	B	O	E	D	O	K	S	E
I	I	R	R	R	K	T	P	O	N	S	L	R	U	L
M	V	R	I	O	L	P	R	O	X	S	E	S	N	T
S	E	A	F	T	O	E	M	A	F	E	S	M	I	N
P	S	F	F	S	V	D	E	S	P	E	R	A	T	E
N	A	C	I	R	E	M	A	H	G	I	E	L	Y	G
S	O	O	N	R	N	O	I	S	I	V	E	L	E	T

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Actor, American, Bachelor, Bones, Boxer, Charles, Desperate, Episodes, Epoch, Fame, Farrah, Father, Gentleman, Golden, Griffin, Housewives, Joanne, Laramie, Leigh, Los Angeles, Love, Miss Match, Munich, Nominations, Opponent, Partners, Patrick, Perry, Redmond, Roles, Small, Soon, Story, Tatum, Television, Theater, The Driver, The Games, Unity

Yesterday's Answer: Mixed

The NEW **TELEWORD VINTAGE COLLECTION EDITION #1** can be purchased on line at www.WonderWordBooks.com. (In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

With LeBron resting, Davis, Hachimura help Lakers rout Jazz

SALT LAKE CITY (AP)—Anthony Davis had 37 points and 15 rebounds, Rui Hachimura scored a career-high 36 points and the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Utah Jazz 138-122 on Wednesday night while resting LeBron James.

The team cited an ankle injury for James, who sat out the second game of a back-to-back in the final game before the All-Star break. He is set to play in his 20th All-Star Game on Sunday in Indianapolis.

Hachimura made a career-best six 3-pointers and topped his previous high of 30 points, which he had reached four times in his five-year career. The Lakers have won six of seven, including four straight on the road.

Collin Sexton scored 18 points for Utah. The Jazz have lost nine of 13 to fall out of the final play-in spot in the Western Conference.

AP

Los Angeles Lakers forward Rui Hachimura (28) reacts after scoring a 3-pointer against the Utah Jazz during the second half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2024, in Salt Lake City.

CLIPPERS 130, WARRIORS 125

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—Norman Powell made four 3-pointers over the final 7:03 to score 21 points and outduel Stephen Curry down the stretch, and Los Angeles Clippers rallied from 12 down in the fourth quarter to beat Golden State.

James Harden had 26 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, and Paul George scored 24 points before fouling out on a night the Clippers were missing leading scorer Kawhi Leonard because of a left leg injury.

Curry scored 41 points and became the first player in NBA history to make seven or more 3-pointers in four straight games, shooting 9 for 19 from deep and 15 of 31 overall.

CELTICS 136, NETS 86

BOSTON (AP)—Payton Pritchard scored 28 points and NBA-leading Boston routed Brooklyn to give Joe Mazzulla his 100th victory as head coach.

Derrick White finished with 27 points. Jayson Tatum added 20 points, nine assists and seven rebounds for the Celtics, who beat the Nets on back-to-back nights and for the fourth time this season in both teams' final game before the All-Star break.

Boston is 43-12. The Celtics went 57-25 in Mazzulla's first season as coach. Wednesday marked the fifth 50-point win in team history.

Trendon Watford had 15 points for the Nets, losers of five of their last six. They trailed by 56 points in the fourth quarter.

SUNS 116, PISTONS 100

PHOENIX (AP)—Kevin Durant scored 25 points and Phoenix overcame fellow All-Star Devin Booker's early ejection to rout Detroit in Pistons coach Monty Williams first game in Phoenix since being fired by the Suns.

Williams coached the Suns from 2019 through last season, leading them to the NBA Finals in 2021. He received a video tribute and a loud ovation from the sellout crowd before the game.

Booker was ejected 5:24 into the game after his second technical foul. He received the first technical for arguing with officials about a foul call against him. During a subsequent timeout and, after the Pistons' Cade Cunningham shot free throws, Booker received the second one and an automatic ejection. Booker finished with seven points on 2-of-5 shooting.

Simone Fontecchio led Detroit with 18 points.

KINGS 102, NUGGETS 98

DENVER (AP)—De'Aaron Fox had 30 points, eight assists and eight rebounds, Domantas Sabonis had 20 points and 13 rebounds and Sacramento overcame a 16-point, second-half deficit to beat Denver.

The win was the Kings' second in a five-day stretch against the Nuggets, who they also beat 135-106 on Friday night in Sacramento.

Coming off a 40-point effort in a loss the previous night against the Phoenix Suns, Fox ignited his team's comeback. He scored 15 points in the fourth quarter.

Aaron Gordon had 25 points and season-high 15 rebounds for Denver. Nikola Jokic had an uncharacteristically poor night, missing 11 of his 17 shots and finishing with 15 points, his lowest scoring output since Jan. 7.

MAVERICKS 116, SPURS 93

DALLAS (AP)—Kyrie Irving scored 34 points, Luka Doncic had 27 before leaving early in the fourth period and Dallas overcame an early 15-point deficit to beat San Antonio.

Doncic left three minutes into the fourth quarter holding his neck. He also had nine rebounds and eight assists in 31 minutes.

The game was the last for both teams before the NBA All-Star break, with the Mavericks winning a season-best sixth straight and Spurs falling for the eighth time in nine contests.

Spurs rookie Victor Wembanyama had 26 points—20 in the first half—and nine rebounds in his belated Dallas debut.

CAVALIERS 108, BULLS 105

CLEVELAND (AP)—All-Star Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points, including the go-ahead free throw with 44 seconds left, and Cleveland overcame a 17-point deficit to beat Chicago.

Coby White had a chance to force overtime as time expired, but his 3-pointer from the top of the key rimmed out.

Isaac Okoro scored 16 points and Jarrett Allen had 13 points and 10 rebounds for Cleveland, which has won 18 of its last 20 and is an NBA-best 23-5 since Dec. 16.

White scored 23 of his 32 points in the second half. DeMar DeRozan added 24 points for Chicago.

MAGIC 118, KNICKS 100

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP)—Paolo Banchero scored 36 points, Franz Wagner added 21 and Orlando beat injury-riddled New York.

Jalen Brunson led the Knicks with 33 points and six assists. Precious Achiuwa added 23 points and 14 rebounds, and Alec Burks had 13 points in his first start since coming back to the Knicks in a deadline trade last week.

Brunson scored 20 points in the first quarter, and the Knicks led 39-27 when Burks opened the second quarter with a 3-pointer. But with Brunson on the bench, the Magic ran off 17 straight points—12 of them by Franz and Moritz Wagner—and moved ahead for the rest of the game.

The Knicks played their final game before the All-Star break without six players, including All-Star forward Julius Randle, who missed a ninth game with a shoulder injury. Donte DiVincenzo (sore hamstring), Bojan Bogdanovic (sore calf) and Isaiah Hartenstein (Achilles tendon) were all ruled out just before the game.

HEAT 109, 76ERS 104

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—Bam Adebayo had 23 points and 14 rebounds to help Miami beat Philadelphia.

Adbebayo's thundering dunk capped a 10-2 run in the fourth quarter that gave Miami a lead it never relinquished.

Tyler Herro also had 23 points, and Duncan Robinson added 20 in the Heat's fourth victory in five games.

Tyrese Maxey scored 30 points for Philadelphia. Buddy Heild had 22 points and 10 assists, and Paul Reed, filling in for the injured Joel Embiid (left knee meniscus procedure), added 18 points and 12 rebounds.

PACERS 127, RAPTORS 125

TORONTO (AP)—Tyrese Haliburton had 21 points and 12 assists, Pascal Siakam scored 23 against his former team and Indiana beat Toronto.

Isaiah Jackson added 15 points and 11 rebounds, Obi Toppin had 15 and Andrew Nembhard 14 to help Indiana rebound from a loss at Charlotte on Monday night.

Scottie Barnes had 29 points and 12 rebounds for Toronto.

HORNETS 122, HAWKS 99

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP)—Brandon Miller scored 26 points, Tre Mann added 21 points, eight rebounds and six assists and Charlotte beat Atlanta for its first three-game winning streak of the season.

Charlotte is 3-0 since adding Mann, Grant Williams, Vasilije Macic, Seth Curry and Davis Bertans at the trade deadline.

De'Andre Hunter had 21 points for Atlanta.

GRIZZLIES 121, ROCKETS 113

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP)—GG Jackson scored 20 points, Jaren Jackson Jr. had 18 and Memphis beat Houston to end a nine-game losing streak.

Luke Kennard finished with 17 points, including a pair of free throws in the closing minute, and Lamar Stevens had 14 points.

Dillon Brooks, Alperen Sengun, Amen Thompson and Aaron Holiday each scored 19 points in Houston's fifth loss in six games.

PELICANS 133, WIZARDS 126

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—Zion Williamson scored 36 points, CJ McCollum added 26 and New Orleans beat Washington, overcoming Deni Avdija's career-best 43 points for the Wizards.

Avdija, a fourth-year player from Israel, blew past his previous high of 25 points before the midpoint of the third quarter, finishing with 20 points in that period. He also matched a season high with 14 rebounds.

Pacers and Indianapolis use 3-year delay to add new wrinkles to 1st NBA All-Star weekend since 1985

INDIANAPOLIS (AP)—The signs are all around downtown Indianapolis now: NBA All-Star weekend finally has arrived.

Yes, nearly seven years after Larry Bird drove a blue-and-gold IndyCar down New York's Fifth Avenue to hand-deliver the city's bid, and three years after Indianapolis' game was moved to Atlanta amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Circle City is about to host another big basketball bash.

And it could be even better than organizers initially thought.

"We could have done it in 2021 like Atlanta with 1,500 people, but we wanted to do it in Indy style," Indiana Pacers COO and president Rick Fuson said Tuesday. "We said, 'Hey, we're going to do this thing bigger and better.'"

Much has changed since Indianapolis last hosted the league's midseason classic in 1985, when a then-record crowd of 43,146 braved a driving snowstorm to watch Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Magic Johnson and Ralph Sampson lead the West past an East squad featuring Bird, Michael Jordan and Isiah Thomas at the Hoosier Dome.

Back then, the city was nicknamed Indiana-no-place.

Today, Indy has grown into a staging ground for some of the world's biggest events—the Super Bowl, the NBA Finals, men's and women's Final Fours, the CFP title game, Olympics trials and the Indianapolis 500—largely because of its reputation for creating hospitable, fan-centric environments in a town where everyone embraces the parties.

Out-of-towners will find more of the same this weekend.

Images promoting the game and its events can be found seemingly everywhere from city skywalks to crowd barricades.

Posters of the All-Star players cover Lucas Oil Stadium, home of the NFL's Indianapolis Colts and host to All-Star Saturday Night, and Gainbridge Fieldhouse, home of the Pacers and WNBA's Indiana Fever and site of Sunday's All-Star Game. There's even a larger-than-life graphic of Pacers star Tyrese Haliburton on the towering 33-story glass facade at the JW Marriott hotel.

The recently opened Bicentennial Plaza features local art and organizers will have three IndyCars on the city's streets, and even Bird could be back in his home state.

But in 2021, amid mask and social distancing mandates, this kind of show might not have been possible. So organizers opted for the delay, using the extra time to complete the fieldhouse's renovation project, adding the plaza and expanding the already grand plan.

They added a high school basketball Knockout Competition that features all of the state's 92 counties and added three new legacy projects, increasing the number from 21 to 24. Heck, the Pacers even acquired Haliburton, a first-time All-Star starter, in February 2022.

"When we had to shift the All-Star Game off of 2021, we were trying to figure out when it would work out and we landed on 2024," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said in October. "But that three years, I think, has really turned out to benefit us."

Now, the Pacers appear ready to shine under the spotlight of a second All-Star weekend.

For Herb Simon, the longest-tenured owner in NBA history at 41 years, and his family, it's everything they imagined it could be—and so much more.

"We're going to welcome the world and showcase our city, showcase everything that we're doing, our organization, our city," said Steve Simon, Herb's oldest son and future team owner. "We're just so thrilled to welcome the world, to do this in partnership with the greatest league in the world, the NBA, and can't wait to host you guys."

Gunfire at Chiefs' Super Bowl celebration kills 1 and wounds nearly two-dozen

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP)—A historic railway station on the edge of downtown Kansas City became the latest backdrop for a mass shooting as gunfire near the end of the Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl celebration sent terrified fans scrambling for cover and left 21 people wounded—including at least eight children—and a mother of two dead.

Wednesday's shooting outside Union Station happened despite the presence of more than 800 police officers who were in the building and nearby, including on top of nearby structures, said Mayor Quinton Lucas, who attended with his wife and mother and ran for safety when the shots rang out.

"Parades, rallies, schools, movies. It seems like almost nothing is safe," Lucas said.

Three people were detained and firearms were recovered, Police Chief Stacey Graves said at an evening news conference. She said police were still piecing together what happened and did not release details about those who were detained or a possible motive.

"I'm angry at what happened today. The people who came to this celebration should expect a safe environment," Graves said.

It is the latest sports celebration in the U.S. to be marred by gun violence, following a shooting that wounded several people last year in Denver after the Nuggets' NBA championship, and gunfire last year at a parking lot near the Texas Rangers' World Series championship parade.

Social media users posted shocking video of police running through Wednesday's crowded scene as people scrambled for cover and fled. One video showed someone apparently performing chest compressions on a victim as another person, seemingly writhing in pain, lay on the ground nearby. People screamed in the background.

AP

A woman is taken to an ambulance after an incident following the Kansas City Chiefs NFL football Super Bowl celebration in Kansas City, Mo., Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2024.

Another video showed two people chase and tackle a person, holding them down until two police officers arrived.

Radio station KKFI said via Facebook that Lisa Lopez-Galvan, host of "Taste of Tejano," was killed.

"This senseless act has taken a beautiful person from her family and this KC Community," KKFI said in a statement.

Lopez-Galvan, whose DJ name was "Lisa G," was an extrovert and devoted mother from a prominent Latino family in the area, said Rosa Izurieta and Martha Ramirez, two childhood friends who worked with her at a staffing company. Izurieta said Lopez-Galvan attended the parade with her husband and her adult son, a die-hard Kansas City sports fan who also was shot.

"She's the type of person who would jump in front of a bullet for anybody—that would be Lisa," Izurieta said.

Kansas City has long struggled with gun violence, and in 2020 it was among nine cities targeted by the U.S. Justice Department in an effort to crack down on violent crime. In 2023 the city matched a record with 182 homicides, most of which involved guns.

Lucas has joined with mayors across the country in calling for new laws to reduce gun violence, including mandating universal background checks.

Lisa Money of Kansas City was trying to gather some confetti near the end of the parade when she heard somebody yell, "Down, down, everybody down!" At first she thought it might be a joke, until she saw the SWAT team jumping over the fence.

"I can't believe it really happened," Money said. "Who in their right mind would do something like this?"

Kevin Sanders of Lenexa, Kansas, said he heard what sounded like firecrackers and then people started running. After that initial flurry, calm returned, and he didn't think much of it. But 10 minutes later, ambulances started showing up.

"It sucks that someone had to ruin the celebration, but we are in a big city," Sanders said.

University Health spokesperson Nancy Lewis said the hospital was treating eight gunshot victims. Two were in critical condition and six were stable. The hospital also was treating four people for other injuries resulting from the chaos after the shooting, Lewis said.

Stephanie Meyer, chief nursing officer for Children's Mercy Kansas City, said it was treating 12 patients from the rally, including 11 children between the ages of 6 and 15, many of whom suffered gunshot wounds. All were expected to recover, she said.

When asked about the condition of the children, Meyer responded: "Fear. The one word I would use to describe what we saw and how they came to us was fear."

St. Luke's Hospital of Kansas City received one gunshot patient in critical condition, a spokesperson said.

Chiefs trainer Rick Burkholder said he was with coach Andy Reid and other coaches and staff members at the time of the shooting, and that the team was on buses and returning to Arrowhead Stadium.

"We are truly saddened by the senseless act of violence that occurred outside of Union Station at the conclusion of today's parade and rally," the team said in a statement.

Missouri's Republican Gov. Mike Parson and first lady Teresa Parson were at the parade during the gunfire but were unhurt. In a statement, he thanked security officers and first responders for their professionalism.

President Joe Biden, who was briefed on the shooting and received updates throughout the day, said the tragedy "cuts deep in the American soul" and called for Congress to take action to prevent gun violence.

"And I ask the country to stand with me," Biden said in a statement. "To make your voice heard in Congress so we finally act to ban assault weapons, to limit high-capacity magazines, strengthen background checks, keep guns out of the hands of those who have no business owning them or handling them."

Throngs had lined the parade route before the shooting, with fans climbing trees and street poles or standing on rooftops for a better view. Players rolled through the crowd on double-decker buses, as DJs and drummers heralded their arrival.

Shooting after Chiefs' Super Bowl parade latest violence to mar sports celebrations

The shooting after the Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl victory parade Wednesday was just the latest example of violence erupting during a championship celebration.

Here are other shootings that have taken place over the last decade either the night a team won a league championship or during the ensuing parade or rally.

JUNE 2016: CLEVELAND CAVALIERS

Police said a person was shot twice in the leg and received injuries that weren't life-threatening during a parade and rally for the Cavaliers' NBA championship.

JUNE 2019: TORONTO RAPTORS

Four people were shot and wounded at a downtown Toronto rally for the NBA champion Raptors. Police said others suffered minor injuries as they tried to get away from the shooting.

OCTOBER 2020: LOS ANGELES DODGERS

Two people were shot to death in Sylmar, California, the night the Los Angeles Dodgers won the World Series. Family members of Juan Carlos Guillen and Marco Antonio Vazquez said the two men were trying to stop people who were smashing car windows with baseball bats.

JULY 2021: MILWAUKEE BUCKS

Two shootings left three people wounded in downtown Milwaukee the night the Bucks won their first NBA title in 50 years. Police said the injuries weren't life-threatening. The shootings were across the Milwaukee River from Fiserv Forum, the Bucks' home arena.

JUNE 2022: DENVER NUGGETS

After the Nuggets' championship parade last year, a shooting took place in downtown Denver that injured two people, though police said they didn't believe the incident was associated with the celebration.

OCTOBER 2022: TEXAS RANGERS

An argument resulted in shots being fired at a parking lot near the Rangers' World Series championship parade, though nobody was injured. ***(AP)***

Travis Kelce says he shouldn't have bumped Chiefs coach Andy Reid

Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce said he went too far when he bumped into coach Andy Reid and screamed at him during the Super Bowl.

Kelce addressed the situation Wednesday on New Heights, his podcast with his brother, longtime Philadelphia Eagles center Jason Kelce.

"Big Red, sorry if I caught you with that cheap shot, baby," Travis Kelce said.

During the second quarter of the game on Sunday, Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes completed a long pass to Mecole Hardman and Reid took Kelce out of the game for the next play. The play resulted in a fumble by Isiah Pacheco that San Francisco recovered. After the play, a fuming Kelce caused Reid to stumble.

After the game, Kelce joked that he was just telling Reid how much he loves him. But the criticism rolled in, so the brothers talked through it on the podcast as they discussed Kansas City's 25-22 overtime win over the 49ers.

"People are all over this, and I mean, I get it," Travis Kelce said.

"You crossed a line," Jason Kelce said. "I think we can both agree on that."

"I can't get to the point where I'm that fired up that I'm bumping coach and it's getting him off balance and stuff. When he stumbled, I was like 'Oh (expletive)' in my head," Travis Kelce said.

"Or even, let's be honest, the yelling in his face, too," Jason Kelce said. "I think there's better ways to handle this retrospectively."

"Yeah. I know," Travis Kelce said. "I'm a passionate guy. I love coach Reid. Coach Reid knows how much I love to play for him, how much I love to be a product of his coaching career."

Travis Kelce said he and Reid have discussed it and "chuckled" about it. ***(AP)***

Old B Bank, Hana FC locks in 1st win of MSL 2

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Old B Bank and Hana Football Club locked in their first win of the Marianas Soccer League 2 Spring 2024 season last Sunday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

Old B Bank was locked and loaded and blanked Shirley's FC, 11-0 in the first MLS 2 game of the day.

They were a well-oiled machine as all parts worked properly and in harmony, with nine of their 11 goals spread between nine players. Lin Xiao Feng set the tone early on with a goal in the second minute, while Aliilua Peteru notched the second goal in the 15th minute.

NMIFA

An Old B Bank and MP United FC player struggle for possession during their game in the Marianas Soccer League 2 at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville last Sunday.

The first half came and went quietly without any more goals from Old B Bank and the pressure was on for Shirley's to get on the scoreboard. It wasn't meant to be though as Old B Bank continued what they started and pelted Shirley's keeper with consecutive goals.

Feng and Peteru scored one more goal each, while John Canape scored two goals later as well, and Ruselle Zapanta, Benedicto Lizama, Raphael Zapanta, Rex De Jose, and Reginald Pascual scored a goal each.

In Hana's game versus MP United FC, both teams struggled for possession throughout. The first goal didn't break through until the 15th minute by Scott Kim and three minutes later, by Saeronara Kim.

MP United couldn't keep possession long enough to push for the goal, and left the first half empty handed. MP United tried to regroup as best as they could in the second half, but only found the net in the 42nd minute from a goal made by James Salalila.

At that point, however, Hana had scored their third goal of the game just three minutes prior. MP United went on to fumble the ball throughout the game and fell, 3-1.

Cruz honored to be president of MRA

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
EDITOR

Ellery Cruz said it's an honor to be elected the president of the Marianas Racing Association.

"I do not take this position lightly and understand that it bears substantial weight. I am confident that with the members of the board elected with me, and most importantly our riders/members, MRA will continue to push forward and flourish," he said.

The 2021 points race Expert Class champion also took time to thank past president Charles Cepeda and past vice president Cuki Alvarez for their unwavering dedication to the sport of motocross and for their exceptional leadership.

"Charles has been a pillar of guidance and support to motocross for a very long time, since it was alive and well years ago and he loves this sport as much as I do. So, I know I have big shoes to fill and it is definitely a bit nerve-wracking coming into this position. However, it is comforting knowing we still have them by our side to lead this group," said Cruz.

He also enjoined the motocross community to help him grow the sport further and perhaps bring it to new heights under MRA's new leadership.

"I'd like to thank all those who have continued to support motocross, be it by showing up on Sundays to cheer us on or watching us on social media platforms, and most especially those who have given us any kind of support to continue this sport. I implore our leaders and community members to come out and see what MRA is about. Motocross is more than getting on a bike to race. It's about fellowship and community, about focus and discipline; it's about taking your energy and channeling it into something healthy. We want our kids in the community to have positive reinforcing outlets and motocross is one of them. In today's world, our kids are turning to negative vices more so than ever. With proper guidance and support, we can steer our youth into healthier directions and that is what we have been aiming to do with motocross."

Joining Cruz in the new leadership team of MRA are vice president Paul Guerrero, secretary Amanda Cruz, and treasurer David Burger.

Cepeda, for his part, congratulated and wished Cruz and the new MRA leadership the best of luck at the helm of the club.

"These past two years have been incredibly exciting and filled with honor as your president. However, I have come to realize that the MRA is in need of a different direction, as evidenced by the election of new board members. Rest assured, I will continue to serve on the board and offer my assistance to the new leadership whenever they require it. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has been incredibly supportive throughout my tenure as president. I am eagerly looking forward to an amazing year in 2024 for the MRA and the motocross community in the CNMI," he said.

'MOTO IV' kicks off

MRA will have Round 1 of its 2024 Points Race Series dubbed "MOTO IV" this Sunday, Feb. 18, at the Cowotwon Race Park.

Cruz said motocross enthusiasts from the young age of 4 up to the "younger age" of 65 will be geared up with their two and four wheels to put on a great show.

"We hope the community joins us in some dirt-packed action fun and excitement this year! Our kids—and big kids—continue working on their skills and techniques to put on a great show. Motocross is a family event, so bring your family, your pop-up tents, cooler with drinks, barbecue pit, and food, and join us for a great day. Don't be shy to come and say hello as well. We welcome everyone to Cowtown in the north!" said Cruz.

MRA would like to send its special thanks to the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation, Monster Energy Drink, Department of Public Works, Saipan Mayor's Office, Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services, and Department of Corrections-Community Service for making their monthly races possible.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Marianas Racing Association president Ellery Cruz, right, poses with the new board of the MRA. The rest of the board, from left, are directors Dave Celis, Ray Yumul, Charles Cepeda, Bridget Camacho, secretary Amanda Cruz, director Cuki Alvarez, and vice president Paul Guerrero. Not in photo is treasurer Dave Burger.

Little League organizational meeting on Feb. 24

Saipan Little League Baseball Inc. will be holding an organizational membership meeting on Feb. 24, 2024 at 10am over at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium conference room.

This organizational membership meeting is for anyone interested in being a part of the board of directors of the SLLB Inc. All interested individuals are encouraged to come and participate in this organizational meeting. ***(PR)***

ACS

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Li, Daniel Huang, Scott Shi, Benjamin Cai, and Andy Chen is on fire and is out for vengeance this season.

Their execution and strategy allowed them to quickly interrupt whatever flow their opponent has, and swing the momentum over to their favor. Led by main hitter Yang—who defends the net well with his hard kills—they are looking like the team to beat after falling to second place last season.

In other results last Tuesday, TMS fought tooth and nail against Dandan Middle School and came out victorious in three sets, 21-15, 17-21, 15-7; Francisco M. Sablan Middle School escaped a rallying Hopwood Middle School, 21-11, 25-24; and Saipan International School defeated Chacha Ocean View Middle School, 21-17, 21-19.

In last Feb. 8's games, TMS II overpowered SIS II, 21-7, 21-13; FMS II edged COVMS II, 21-12, 21-17; HMS II trounced DMS II, 21-12, 21-6; GCA made light work of Saipan Community School, 21-9, 21-9; and DMS put up a great fight against HMS in three sets, 22-20, 21-19, 15-12.

As of last Tuesday in the varsity standings, ACS leads the league with their undefeated record of four wins, while Mount Carmel School is right behind with the only other undefeated record of three wins. SIS and FMS are in third place with a 3-1 record; TMS is at 2-2; GCA, HMS, COVMS, and DMS are at 1-3 each; and SCS have yet to win with three losses.

HMS

From page 24

continued her hot streak and went 3-for-3.

The second inning saw TMS score four runs; they then scored two in the fourth; and they ended with seven more runs in the last inning.

Only Chloe Shin and Annabella Tudela managed to round the bases and score SCS-GCA-SIS' two runs in the first inning. From there, TMS pitching staff ensured a safe passage throughout the rest of the game as they left SCS-GCA-SIS nine runners stranded on base.

In the other game that day, Chacha Ocean View Middle School bagged their second win when they defeated Francisco M. Sablan Middle School, 14-10.

In the standings behind HMS and TMS are COVMS with a 2-1 record; MCS at 1-1; FMS has 1-2; and SCS-GCA-SIS have yet to win with three losses.

NMI

From page 24

the match," Macario said.

"The kids are excited and will definitely give all their best come game time," the NMI coach added.

Meanwhile, after the three-day training camps and following the scrimmages and practice sessions at the Badminton Geelong, Pangilinan said Tahiti and Cook Islands would be the toughest teams to beat in the competition. Cook Islands will have its opener against New Caledonia in the morning match, while Tahiti will also see action in the 9am schedule, challenging Fiji. The NMI will battle Fiji in the afternoon match today at 5pm to wrap up its opening day assignments. Then this Saturday, the NMI will face Tahiti in the 9am match before taking on the Cook Islands in the afternoon. For its last game in the round-robin play, the NMI will square off against New Caledonia this Sunday.

"We will be cheering for our NMI Junior National Team back home as they take on Guam and Fiji in the first day of the competition in Australia and the three remaining teams this weekend. The Northern Marianas Badminton Association has full confidence in the team. We believe that what they have been working on for months in their training sessions will come into play and translate into positive results," NMBA president Merlie Tolentino said. ***(PR)***

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With LeBron resting, Davis, Hachimura help Lakers rout Jazz.

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HMS, TMS undefeated in girls softball

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Hopwood Middle School Hilitais and Tanapag Middle School Tatagas are looking like the teams to beat as they both boast undefeated records in the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Girls Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024.

The Hilitais blanked Mount Carmel School, 18-0, for their third win, while the Tatagas took down the Nonpublic School team made up of Saipan Community School-Grace Christian Academy-Saipan International School, 20-2, for their second win, last at the Dandan Softball Field

HMS had a jumpstart in the first inning when seven runs came in even before the second out. MCS pitcher Miana Dela Cruz struggled to bring them down until finally the third out came by way of a strikeout to Kaeley Schardt.

MCS got on base just twice at their turn with the bat and were quickly shut down by HMS pitcher Elinie Delos Santos.

In the second inning, four more runs scored for the Hilitais from the first to the fourth batter as clean-up hitter Lailey Teregeyo hit a 3-RBI triple. The third inning was a different story though, as Dela Cruz struck out the side.

However, HMS capitalized on Dela Cruz's inability to get them out in the final inning and put up seven more runs for a huge 18-0 lead. MCS couldn't bring their baserunners home and inevitably, the third and final out rang as they left a 0 on the scoreboard.

In the first game of the morning, the Tatagas brought SCS-GCA-SIS to their knees with the first blowout win of the day.

TMS' Chelsea Santos hit a homer in the first inning and put them in a 7-2 lead. Santos

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LEIGH GASES
A Hopwood Middle School batter swings at a pitch during their game in the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Girls Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024 at the Dandan Softball Field.

ACS leads MS boys v-ball

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Agape Christian School Torchbearers leads the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Volleyball League 2023-2024 with four straight wins.

Their two recent conquests were over Grace Christian Academy in two sets, 21-9, 21-14, last Tuesday and Tanapag Middle School also in two sets, 21-14, 21-14, last Feb. 8.

The Torchbearers' roster of Daniel Yang, Raffy Cai, Danny Cheng, Reyviel Escarlan, Joseph Yang, Benny

ACS on Page 22

LEIGH GASES
Agape Christian School players defend the net during their game against Hopwood Middle School last Feb. 8 in the NMI-VA-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Volleyball League 2023-2024 at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

NMI Jr. badminton players duel Guam in opener

Neighbors cross paths in the opening day of the Pacific Under 17 Invitation Team Challenge 2024 as the NMI Junior National Badminton Team takes on Guam today at the Badminton Geelong in Victoria, Australia.

The NMI versus Guam pairing in the mixed competition is scheduled to start at 1pm (2pm Saipan time) with the opposing teams testing each other's might in five events—the men's and women's singles and doubles and mixed doubles. Suiting up for the NMI are Marianas High School students Genelyn Lansangan, Marlon Bautista, and Sernantie Jimenez, Saipan Southern High School's Shaina Malonzo, Saipan International School's Lina Tsukagoshi, and Tanapag Middle School's Evan Seguritan. Coaching the NMI bets are Pacific Games veterans Janelle Pangilinan and Ezekiel Macario. They will be up against Guam's Kristine Deng, Jacob Paredes, Danielle Saner, Johnson Yu, and Alan Zheng.

The six junior players are coming into the tournament after undergoing a three-day training camp at the same venue and are excited for their first game.

"They are looking forward to this great opportunity of playing against a lot of teams. It's really helpful that before the competition, we had this training camp, as our players were able to see their opponents, had scrimmage with them, and gauged their skill level. When they go out there and play in the opening day, they have a better idea on how to approach

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
From left, Lina Tsukagoshi, Shaina Malonzo, Evan Seguritan, Sernantie Jimenez, Marlon Bautista, and Genelyn Lansangan pose with the NMI flag before starting their training camp at the Badminton Geelong in Victoria, Australia last Wednesday.